

DOWN THE CORRIDORS

NOVELS

Published by Chapman & Hall

The Splendid Eli

The Safety Catch

Bar Sinister

Straight on for England

The Curate's Wand

BOOKS FOR BOYS

Published by Oxford University Press

The Adventures of Bill Holmes

Bill Holmes and the Red Panthers

Bill Holmes and the Fortune-Teller

DOWN THE CORRIDORS

FIELDEN HUGHES



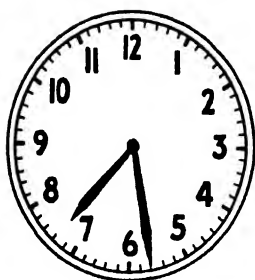
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FOR
HERBERT VAN THAL
who may have forgotten some of his school lessons,
but not those of wisdom and humanity.

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'I WOKE up about the same time as usual ; within a few minutes one way or the other. I looked at the clock. It happened to be seven twenty-eight, but it might just as well have been seven twenty-three, or even seven thirty-four. Much earlier than these would have been inconvenient, for I do not really want the time ; but anything much later would have been a bore, for I have a programme.

It seems odd that I cannot arrive in the world after sleep like a punctual train every morning. If it turns out to be as near half-past seven as all that, why do I have to run a bit early one morning and a bit late the next ? It cannot be chance, for nothing is. It is not going to bed earlier or later. That I have established. Oh well, it is another of those mysteries that couldn't matter less to a man with a lot of work to do. But if I knew the answer to it, I might have the key to a number of other matters, such as the moment of death. Must a man die at, say, four-ten a.m.? Or might he, if he had the hang of this technique of sleeping and waking, put it off for a few hours out of regard for the family's comfort, for even dying ought to be timely, and a death-bed scene closely followed by eggs and bacon at eight o'clock is a more civilised thing than one which leaves the mourners nothing to do for about four hours except drink tea, smoke cigarettes and wait for the world to wake up in order to learn the sad news.

Awake, I stepped straight out of bed. I have no interest in lying there in a voluptuous daze for a bit longer. Once

my eyes are open, I follow my glance with my body, and it took me a long time to learn that other people have different ways of facing the necessity of starting to live again after sleep.

It was a bright morning yesterday, but to me all mornings are charming, with the charm of youth and possibility; mysterious too, as midday is mediocre, afternoon middle-aged, evening sedate, and night inscrutable.

I pulled on my dressing-gown, and went to the front door, *for the newspapers and the letters (if any) lying on the mat.* There were two of each for me, so I took them in to the kitchen to read while I boiled a kettle for tea.

I took tea to the rest of the household, and smoked a cigarette (while I had mine and read letters and newspapers.

Then I went to the bathroom and had a shave and a cold bath. Well, of course, I know the cold bath is a show-off. I don't actually enjoy it, but I do enjoy having had it, and it gives me my sole claim to being tough. It's a much cleaner habit to have a hot bath, which removes dirt far better, although the disappearance of skin-oils in floods of hot water leaves a horrid dryness till Nature adjusts matters again in her dirt-loving comfortable way.

By this time, my wife had prepared breakfast, and I entered on that comical rôle, being enacted by millions of other people about the same time, of the well-bathed properly-dressed busy man of affairs having his breakfast and reading what's left of the paper.

What the blazes it has to do with the V. P.D. Busy Man of Affairs that some other busy men have robbed a bank in Dundee, or that the President of Buena Strico has formed a new and more liberal government, I do not know, although I never read the newspaper without thinking what a cursed gossiping habit it is, and how much happier, healthier and better off we should all be if newspapers vanished from the face of the earth. I should be very content indeed to leave it to the B.B.C. to inform me briefly of the news I *had* to hear, such as that there was a railway strike, and I must either find other means of transport or give up the idea of a holiday. Yet I

I cannot voluntarily give up taking newspapers and reading every wretched bit of tittle-tattle that has passed into the columns as a "story." Why in Heaven's name I should think it right to waste my time learning that a woman has had five babies at a sitting, so to speak; or that Mr. Bluett's Jersey Cow has given ten more gallons of milk this year than any cow in Europe, I cannot tell. If the journalists thought it worth printing, I suppose I think it worth reading. The horrible irony is that they only thought it worth printing, because they believed that I would think it worth reading. Of course, I do actually pay for it in part too, and any man of thrifty mind hesitates to throw into the dust-bin what he has paid for but not used or consumed. It happens that I love my wife, but any man who does not may find a paper a cheap shield. I have not even that reason. I would give up buying and reading papers if I had not been trained in the national habit of poking my nose into matters that do not in the least concern me, under the pretence that even from a professional point of view, I must be well informed in what they call, too grandly, the news of the day.

When I had read the paper to exhaustion, come to the end of my after-breakfast cigarette, and glanced into my now-empty cup, a slight feeling of desolation came over me, as it does every morning at this moment. It is akin to the feeling one had as a child when one had lost the way. That is easily dealt with. I look at the clock. It stands at eight-thirty, which restores to me my man of affairs status. I not only have somewhere to go and something to do, but I have no choice about it, short of dying, staging an illness or plainly playing truant. In fact, I want to do none of these things, which are equally repugnant though for various and different reasons.

Yesterday morning, as on countless days before, I rose, kissed my wife as she sat at the table, saw her placid look which told me three things, and walked briskly out of the house.

The three things in my wife's glance were, first, that her

world was going according to ordained plan, and that the old man was off to work as usual ; second, that she didn't have to hurry over her cup of coffee and paper ; third, that as she worked longer and later than I did about the household jobs, it was but reasonable that she should begin later.

It must now be clear that I start my work at nine in the morning. Most of what are called the working class begin earlier. The clerical and administrative classes often begin a little later. It is therefore obvious that I begin work at the same hour as the schoolchildren. More than that, I begin work with them, because I am a headmaster.

It won't do at all to arrive at a school on the stroke of nine. Schools begin work at nine, so everybody is required to be on the premises at not later than ten minutes to nine. No Education Committee has had either the extravagance or the obtuseness to put a clocking-in machine at the entrance to its schools, but time was when some of them ordered that a Time Book should be kept for the staff. Assistants could arrive as early as they liked—within reason—but the dead-line was ten to nine, at which hour the headmaster was required to sign in, drawing a red line under his signature. Anybody signing in after that was deemed to be officially late. The rule was that a man or a woman must sign in one column, and in the next put the time of arrival, to the minute. The book was displayed to the Governors at their termly meeting, and this put a teacher with a sense of humour into a nice dilemma. Although it might be his habit to arrive at a quarter to nine every morning without fail or variation, it seemed almost inhuman of him to have put that hour in the book for a whole term. On the other hand, if he invented funny hours of arrival, like a train on a branch line, there might have been amused comment at the Governors' meeting. One of the most terrible things about being a Governor of a school is that the agenda is often so boring as to be almost beyond human endurance, so the Governors get to making observations about small matters like the odd fact that Mr. Jones is never a minute early or late, or that Mr. Smith arrives in a progression of minutes

from eight-thirty to eight-fifty, and then declines again into undue earliness.

As I walked down the street towards the school yesterday, I saw many people whom I know. I observe that my acquaintance divides itself into several classes. The people who are at the end of the rope, so to speak, appear to regard my office with a gratifying respect, making it clear from their manner that they think the work of a teacher is very important. Those who live somewhere near the middle of the rope that binds me impalpably to other people add to that a twinkle of amusement about the job, like Ferris the builder who asks me from time to time how I managed to get myself appointed to a sinecure. My intimates, of course, treat me as a friend and a man, and show no more sign of being aware of the manner in which I get my living than I show towards them about theirs.

It was very pleasant as I walked along to see people, especially those whom to encounter was rather like hearing a good joke over again, or who have a stock line of humour, like Sam Bedhampton, the ill-dressed hydraulic engineer, who never fails of a quotation that he thinks *à propos*. On my way to school, he may say, " 'And still they gazed and still the wonder grew . . . ' " To this I am expected to say with a cynical grin, "I know. I know. 'How one small head could carry all he knew.' " If he sees me at lunch-time, he cries from his archway across the road, "May good digestion wait on appetite."

I didn't see him yesterday, for he is away, called as a witness in some litigation in the County town. When I reached the school gate and entered the domain where nobody questions my word, authority or wisdom, the church clock was striking a quarter to nine. Mr. French was just going round the corner of the building, blowing the dust out of his whistle ready to assemble the boys in the yard.

I have said it was a bright morning, and indeed it was so in every observable respect. The inmost self was, as always, grimly amused to notice that I cast upon the brightness about me a glance of approval, as if the world and the space around

it were an estate, and I its pleased owner ; which is in fact how I find myself viewing it. As I turned in at the school gate, the air on my face and hands was warm and kind, like a friend's smile. The sky was a new morning blue, with slow-moving white clouds travelling across it as amiably as a herd of cows ambling along a country road. All that celestial hereditament belonged to me as closely as if its placidity were an extension of my own. The trees in the yard, I saw, were on duty as usual, softening the austerities of the building, and the long shadows were already exculpating the sharp angles and utility lines of the school. The main road outside was set for the day's duties and mentioned several attractive places to which it led, and which would come seven hours nearer to my pleasure when the school day was over.

Occasional cars, whose owners were linked to me not by acquaintance but by common humanity and the necessity of starting work hummed along in a thread of sound which joined the school to the world as much as did the whistle of an engine from the station, the noise and stir of the birds in the trees about the yard, or the postman who followed me up to the front door, and gave me the letters.

With them in my hand, I went into the corridor and saw Grice, the caretaker, standing there. He was arranged to look as if he had chanced to be there when I came in, but he knew and I knew that he was there by design. His reasons were several and quite comprehensible, though artistic appeal was not one of them, for he was a tall thin man dressed in a very old suit of khaki and a curious hat rather like a sailor's cap. In his hand was a broom, held like a rifle, and when he saw me, he did a movement evolved by himself as a mark of respect and disarmament, based on springing to attention without presenting brooms.

" Good morning, sir," he said.

" Morning, Mister Grice," I replied.

That Mister was a part of his reward, for he did the job more to oblige the County Council than of economic necessity ; or so he made too clear for mistake either way.

Still, he was, he must admit, either under my orders, or not under orders at all, so when I came in, he was there to cope with that glance I was certain to cast at a point beneath the nearest radiator, to see if any fluff had been swept and left under there. Or he would deal with any mean dissatisfaction I might display about any part of his job. On my side, I invariably spoke of the cause of complaint as if it had been the weather.

"There's a rare smell of dust about this morning," I might say. Or in winter, "Odd how cold it is in here."

To remarks in such bad taste as these, he would convey in his manner sympathy, a courtesy as deep and slow as a diver's, and a certain detached interest in the facts to be advanced in reply.

"It's the new sweeping powder," he would answer to the first complaint. "They reckon it'll lay the dust. My experience is that it gets under it and sends it up to the ceilings." The thing to do, evidently, was to send a condemnatory telegram to the Directors of the sweeping-powder firm, and not by any means to make small talk to Grice about feathery lovely dust, just because it was in the wrong place. As to cold classrooms, Grice would smile pityingly and give a short talk about the coal industry.

"There's no heat in this lot of coal," he would say. "You might just as well try to burn a lot of rubble. I don't know why they trouble to fetch it to the top. I don't really. They pay the miners enough. You'd think they might find a bit of good coal. But it's always the same."

Grice must have led an emotional life of singular sterility, judging by the number of occasions on which he found things to be always the same, for he would conclude many a dissertation with this rather slighting comment on life. But when it came out, I knew he was through, so I used to play my ace.

"Mister Grice," I would say, "I know the difficulties. But tomorrow morning don't let there be a smell of dust, even if you have to get down to soap and water to kill it."

And as for the cold classrooms, I would tap the thermometer on the wall, and say, "If the rooms are under fifty degrees—this mark here—the boys will all get influenza. An epidemic will sweep the town, and I shall be in dreadful trouble. Not less than fifty degrees, Mister Grice, and then you and I will be keeping our jobs, d'ye see?"

A warm smile of gratitude would irradiate his face, as I made it obvious how we could, with one blow of a masterly policy, keep our own appointments, and at the same time confirm the miners and the Directors of the sweeping-powder firm in theirs. With one finger, he would solemnly touch that strange headgear of his, and in the tone of my fellow-conspirator with all the world against us, he would say, "Leave it to me, sir."

On this bright morning, he got away with whatever secret of incompetence he was guarding with smile and broom, and I went into my room as Mr. French blew the whistle for the boys to assemble in the yard.

That operation of assembly I knew so well that I could see it with my ears. There was the chaos of sound, a sea of voices, the steady noise of the vocal breakers, the spray of high tones, the occasional shout going up like a lofty wave, the shrill of the whistle, and then dead silence as every boy stood still, carved in hush, caught in the act of raising a foot to kick a ball or an arm to catch a playmate. The whistle again and then the running of feet as they fell in on the long lines of their various classes.

I heard Mr. French's voice as he announced an article found or lost, gave an order or rebuked some restless lad whose eyebrow would not maintain decent order.

Short sharp commands turned the parade and set it marching into the school, and as the first boy entered the large door at the end of the wide corridor, Mr. Santaya—as English as a member of the Smith family—began to play a brisk march on the piano near the door of my room. This march—though well played, for Mr. Santaya was an excellent musician—had a certain official quality about it. There was, so to speak, no suggestion of option about the manner in which it was played.

Much more, it sounded like a tuneful part of an iron system, operated in those parts, but directed from somebody's desk in Whitehall.

In my room, still seeing with my sense of hearing, looking at my letters, and awaiting the first duty of my day, I became aware that the school was all under my roof. The sound of six hundred feet died away, Mr. Santaya gave a last flourish, like an official signature, and hastened away to his own classroom. The teachers began to mark their registers with a swift and practised hand and voice, and I could hear, like the fire of small arms, the sound of many boys in several rooms replying to the challenge of the register and indicating that they were lawfully present.

People on the staff used different methods to mark their registers. In one room, a man would simply call out the names of his class, in a cascade of Brownings, Curtises, Deans, Fullers, Grants, Hallams, and so on that sounded like a roll-call of the English people. Another would do it by a number series, so that the boys shot out their number, and the teacher kept the business going by calling out the number of an absentee himself. A third would settle for each boy calling out his own name, the teacher saying the name of an absent one. Names and numbers, men's voices and boys' echoed dimly round the corridor for a few minutes, then there was a silence, and then the opening of doors and the tramp of feet as the classes gathered for prayers.

The clock on my mantelpiece showed a minute or so before nine. The letters, opened and read, lay on my desk, seven this morning :

1. Delivery note for stationery from the contractors for school supplies.
2. Three catalogues from publishers of school books.
3. One medical certificate that Patrick Burnaby is absent from school suffering from impetigo.
4. Letter from the County Education Officer saying that although Frederick Mallock is over-age for the Scholarship Examination, he will be admitted this year as he

was ill last year, though the circumstances are special and do not constitute a precedent.

5. Letter asking for a testimonial from an old boy called Michael Winnish, now seeking a post as a male nurse. My memory of him makes me apprehensive about the fate of his patients, but I must do what I can, for my duty is to Michael and not to his unknown and possible victims.

There is a tap on my door, and Rex Lancer, my personal "monitor" comes in.

"School all ready, sir," he says. I look on him—every day—with great favour. He is a kind modest boy, clean and handsome, who pays me the enormous compliment of affection and understanding. He takes my heavy-handed humour with a shy smile, he hastens to interpret and meet my mood, and acts towards me as if my business were the most important thing in the world, and his part in it, not a menial task, but high privilege. I often talk to him with a pedantry of jocosity I dare not use with my grown-up friends, and while I do not believe he has the faintest idea what I am talking about at such times, he has his own technique of pretending to do so, which touches me and makes me feel ashamed of not finding a simpler and more candid approach to so faithful an admirer. I once told him that the anniversary of the Battle of Hastings and the anniversary of my birth occurred on the same day, fatuously supposing that I had fastened in his mind one historical fact about his country's story.

All that happened was that, after that, I found on every birthday a small packet on my desk with no inscription or signature. Every year I shake my head at him when I see him next after receiving the gift and I say :

"You mustn't do it, Lancer."

Then he looks up from his job of copying the attendance figures out of the register into the summary book and says :

"Do what, sir ?"

As for the Battle of Hastings, he very naturally could not ~~rake~~ **take** up an atom of interest about it, but would trot this speck

of information out for the delectation of an inspector if he thought it might do me and the school a bit of good. He intends to be a photographer when he leaves school, and does not envisage being able to use information about Hastings or anything so remote from the true interests of his prospective customers.

When he knocked at my door and gave me the news that the school was ready, I nodded and thanked him. I picked up my school prayer book from my desk and walked out of my room into the silent presence of my pupils.



I CAN describe what I saw as I stepped on to the platform—the choir in front of me, the hundreds of boys behind them and to my left and right, the masters dotted about the assembly, and Mr. Santaya at the little organ. Behind me, on the wall, the oak board for the hymn numbers, and beyond the windows the morning and the weather, as much an undertone to the service as if it had been part of the plan.

But what I cannot describe—and it would be dull, futile and frustrating to attempt it—is the importance and happiness, the unity of pleasure of this school ceremony, taking place every morning, month in, month out, year by year.

School prayers and assembly are ordained by law to be carried out in every school, but if they do not focus and concentrate the power and unity, the spirit and feeling of

one-ness of the school ; if everyone is not caught up into the whole in a pride of happiness, it were far better that an assembly should be forbidden by law.

In me, as I stood before the school ready to begin the service, were many thoughts of a—what can I say ?—*linking* force and direction. I believed that through the service, the school moved to the centre of life and joined itself to God. I was not satisfied unless I *felt*—that is, had the deep sense of fulfilment, like a deep breath—that every man and boy present was not only taking pleasure and reality from the whole, but was completely giving his part of it back again. Often, in my private living, I wavered in faith, but the school service, asserting so strongly its link with the Christian community in all times and places, and with the Church, at large, and in the quiet fifteenth-century building near the school, excluded every shadow from my mind. In assembly, I was most keenly aware of my fellowship with the boys, as human beings, as a man with men, and as my fellow-townsmen. But all, I was sustained before them by my love of them, and I believed was their affection for and trust in me. That if anything was, my work and life, my reason and excuse.

A school ought, since it is a young organism, to be, with the qualities of youth. Urgency, eagerness, a sense of supreme importance of the present, laughter, a high vitality, excitement about all its doings, hopefulness, readiness to try something new, hatred of shams, and a healthy irreverence mixed up with its love of traditions—the impact of all these things ought to be the sign of its youth and life.

Human beings can only show what is in them through the signs that are possible to them. It is not very long before a schoolmaster can tell from the signs what his boys are showing him. In prayers I saw their faces, watched what was in their eyes and expressions, and knew from the noble singing of the first hymn of the morning how it was with us. By good fortune and by a blessing most devoutly to be sought, every man on the staff and less consciously every boy in school knew that we had got hold of something—a spirit that shone

most unanimously and obviously at prayers—which we must hold on to ; and could only keep by the regular, delighted and assiduous individual care of it. It was akin to the spiritual substance of a happy family, where in spite of troubles and difficulties, of misunderstandings and ordinary human fallibility, every member knows that fundamentally all is very well, and that in the hands of each is a share of the goodness, in the keeping of each some part of its continuance.

The signs which I on my side could show the boys of my health, as part of their community, were by my office the most numerous. Each morning I had the chance to speak to them at prayers, quite briefly.

Whatever the content of my address, I treated my audience with the same respect as the wisest of adult assemblies, and tried to say what I had to say as aptly and beautifully as my powers of speech enabled me to do. This was as it ought to have been, because there is no better audience than children, none more quick to respond to living speech, to humour, to drama, and to a good point.

Those fearsome bores who visit schools to make speeches of inordinate length and dullness, who tell those horrible chestnuts about the two frogs in the churn of cream, and who seek a vain approbation by truckling to what they think to be the child's outlook—i.e. indolent, insolent but secret insubordination—ought to be refused out of hand by the heads of the schools they love to infest.

So ought those impenetrable asses who come to give a lecture on their subject and make no concession whatever to the only real limitation of children—the need for appropriate methods of presentation. There is no subject which does not interest the young, for they are entirely unspecialised—that is to say, they are not yet shut out of everything by reason of overloaded interest in something.

On one occasion, I had been weak enough to agree to a man visiting my school to give a lecture because of my respect for his deep knowledge of his subject. In private talk, he was gay, merry and amusing. In front of some

hundreds of boys he was dull, prosy, and interminable. I had agreed to four boys being allowed to leave the lecture early for sufficient personal reasons. After half an hour of the lecture, when my own soul was yawning like a baker's oven, I stopped the lecturer with a smiling apology, and said that those who had permission to do so might now leave.

What happened was like an illustration from a collection of a headmaster's nightmares. Like the wind passing over a field of standing corn, ripe unto harvest, a great unanimous movement swept over the audience, and hundreds rose to leave. In a moment the lecture room would have been empty by process of one of the most polite but resolute débâcles in history. By the abuse of power, I halted the retreat. With a grimness coming out of my resolve not to be left alone with the lecturer, I announced that permission had been given to four persons to leave, and I implied that I did not now care what four went, but at four it had to stop. With a kind of regretful and resigned sigh, the risen multitude sat down again. But it seemed that the affable and complacent lecturer saw nothing ominous about the incident, for when the happy four had gone, he gave me a little bow and a smile, and went on for another hour, saying, when I had spoken my word of lying thanks, that perhaps he might come again as he had only scratched the surface of the subject. As I smiled like a tiger thirsting for tea and implied an agreement the contrary of my determination, the boys clapped with a fervour which paid more tribute to the inexorable clock than to the unendurable fortitude of the lecturer.

Yesterday, when prayers were over, I left the platform and returned to my own room, where I knew a small queue would shortly gather to see me on various matters. The school, dismissed from assembly by the Second Master, Mr. Aintree, went back to the classrooms to begin the day's lessons. The interviews in my room would have to be pretty brief, because I had a form of my own of no less than sixty boys.

Hardly was I inside my room before the first knock came.

"Come in."

The first caller was my personal monitor again, Rex Lancer, holding in his hand a collection of notes from parents.

"Absence notes, sir," he said, and putting them on my desk, he went out again.

Each one of the notes told me why one of my pupils had been absent. It was Lancer's business to collect them each morning from the returned boys outside my door. They ranged in appearance from the very businesslike letter, typed on good or at any rate adequate notepaper, to the hasty note scrawled on the handiest bit of paper at the last minute and written by a busy mother surrounded by her children and swamped with the business of getting breakfast and speeding them all off to school. One such was from Mrs. Crane, telling me that Laurence had been absent because he had been bitten by midges and had then got into an awful mess by scratching the places in his sleep till his legs had to be seen by the doctor.

I knew the Crane home and I could picture the scene when the note was at last written. The family lived in a small and not very attractive cottage by the river. There were seven children, and Mr. Crane was an odd-jobber who would tackle anything, from digging your garden to distempering the outdoor lavatory.

I liked Mr. Crane a good deal. Though not very clean in appearance, he had fine blue eyes and a sunburnt skin, and doubtless a more scrupulous attention to cleanliness and clothing would have made him one of the most handsome men in the town.

But better still, he had a rare independence of spirit and judgment, and took his hat in his hand for no man and no trouble. He showed a sly humour about life, and would wrinkle up those blue eyes and come out with a remark so witty and so indicative of a gay scorn for middle-class standards that it almost seemed worth while being Mr. Crane to enjoy such states of mind as appeared to support him all the day long of his troublous life.

A lady of substance with a concern for the Mr. Cranes of

late when the prefect on duty had locked it at nine o'clock. The dialogue between them and me was not very inspiring or original. Once I told the lates that if any man amongst them would offer me an excuse I had never heard before, he would have the lateness on me. Nobody could think of a new one. Now I said to the first of the three :

" Well ? "

" The clock was slow, sir."

" You ? " To the second.

" We all overslept, sir."

" And you ? " To the third.

" I had to go to the grocer's, sir."

" Detentions all round. And don't be late for a long long time. Right. Is there anyone else outside ? "

" Only Capper, sir."

" Send him in."

They went out, I heard a whisper, and in came Capper.

He was a tall dark boy with curly hair and brown thoughtful eyes. His father was a local policeman. I looked at him and waited.

" It's about my library book, sir."

" What about it ? "

" I've lost it, sir."

" Well ? "

" Mr. Graham told me to report to you."

Mr. Graham was the Librarian on the staff—an extra job, for he took games, and got the job of Librarian as cultural makeweight.

" Why ? "

" He said I must pay for a new copy. It was Ballantyne's—*The World of Ice*. It costs six shillings, sir."

" Well, that's the end of it, isn't it ? Six shillings."

Capper looked troubled.

" Father won't pay, sir."

" Why should he ? He didn't lose it, did he ? "

" That's what he says, sir."

" Well then . . . "

"I haven't got six shillings, sir."

"You told Mr. Graham?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he sent you to me?"

"Yes, sir."

So they were all at rest . . . on me. Father; teacher, Capper.

"Do you have pocket money?"

"A little, sir."

"How much?"

"Sixpence a week, sir."

"Twelve weeks."

He did not commend my maths; just looked at the judge.

"What can you pay?"

"Threepence a week, sir."

"All right. Pay threepence a week for the twelve weeks. That's half of it. The school will pay the other half."

"Thank you, sir."

"And do be careful with the books, Capper."

"I try to be, sir."

I believed that.

"If the book turns up . . ."

"I don't think it will, sir."

"Why not? It might. Where did you leave it?"

"In the train going to Dover."

"Oh. No, I don't think it will. But if it does, you'll get the money back, Capper."

"Thank you, sir. Is that all?"

"Yes. Off you go."

In fact, the book did turn up. Somebody had the decency to return it to the school, seeing the label in the front. In any case, we took nothing from Capper, except the sixpennyworth of his peace of mind for a fortnight, till the book arrived.

When he had gone, I left my room and went swiftly to my classroom. I took the top class, which numbered sixty boys of fourteen, whittling down as they left during the year to about a dozen.

But there they sat yesterday. Sixty people. As I went into the classroom and closed the door, I felt a happy excitement. They were mine, to do the best I could for them in their last year at school ; and I was theirs, the man given to them not by their choice but by somebody who would never have to sit in the desks and learn from me.

In the days of which I speak, any man in charge of a class in such a school was required to be a general practitioner, to use a cliché that drew a parallel. He had to teach each and every subject on the timetable.

The intellectual atmosphere in the room always seemed to me to be a continuous colloquy between me and the class, in which I chose the topics and led the discussions, projects and enterprises.

As for me, it was obviously true that I should love certain subjects, be neutral about others, and downright irreverent concerning still others. In English, I was a fanatic, and the boys in the desks had at least the entertainment of watching a man dealing with something that he clearly thought was of the most earth-shaking importance and beauty. In maths, my manner became a trifle superior as fitted one who was dispensing the tricks of a low cunning. The image of myself teaching science struck me as very amusing indeed, and if I may presume to judge, I was probably at my worst in this subject.

Nowadays, specialisation is the rule almost everywhere in Secondary education, and where the main object of teaching is instruction at a high level, there can be nothing else. But in Secondary Modern Schools, which are, after all, the old Elementary Schools under an expedient label, the price of a specialisation which may not be necessary is very high. No general practitioner could be expected to show expert knowledge in every subject, but he had his boys with him all day and every day for a year. If he was a bad or an indifferent teaching personality, his capacity for damage was measured and confined to a room for a year. But if he happened to be a good teacher, capable of evoking affection and emulation ; able to form in

his boys habits of quiet study; able to discern talent and aptitude and encourage them; able above all to show for a whole year a picture of a whole man, what he was did more for his pupils than anything he taught.

The position in school today does daily outrage to my teaching sense. In many schools, classes go from one subject room to another, changing over and having a walk at the end of each period. Down goes the tension which could and should obtain all day long in school. Down breaks the orderly pattern of thought into a thousand pieces. Gossip on the short journey pushes out the agenda of the school, or else the children march about the place like a lot of convicts, mumchance. And the man who receives them must clear their minds, not of cant, but of the tripe of stolen interchange, point their minds to what he has to teach, make sure he has got the lot of them there, give out his paraphernalia, and then, by Heaven, dispose them to listen to him if not with ecstasy, then with enough attention to pass muster.

All analogies break down. But just think how devoutness might suffer if a congregation sat in one church for everything up to the Venite, then tore off to another place for the Psalms and Lessons, and to a third for the sermon and the rest of the service. Or what would be the impact of a play if the first act were to be done by one cast in one room, the second elsewhere by another, and the last by yet another cast in a third place?

If specialisation in Secondary Modern Schools isn't watched with a lynx' eye, and isn't carried out by brilliant people, it can turn out to be as worthless as a daylong series of variety turns by indifferent academic comedians who can't even raise a laugh, but who do all the blethering while the children sit in one gas-filled auditorium after another, doing nothing but twiddling their thumbs and taking it easy. Relatively few are the teachers who can take Classics with a Sixth Form, or Science with a good Fifth Form. But numerous are those who can take Geography, History, English, Maths and all the rest of it with a company of healthy boys who may have failed

Common Entrance, but who can and do respond vitally to a lively well-informed man who brings them both the graces of the spirit and enough food for the mind to fit his pupils for their lives in the future.

The good teacher in a Secondary Modern School is an artist in method and presentation. A great scholar might well fail where he succeeds, and this teacher's gifts, used for his pupils, are of incalculable value to the nation. Leave the man alone then, all day long, with his boys. His learning is enough, his influence beyond price, *but it must have time and quiet in which to work.*

There's another thing too about a teacher having his class to himself all day long. You can draw up schemes of work, and syllabuses with all the care you like. Most of the memorable valuable things that happen to boys in a classroom cannot be got on to paper at all. They arise by splendid accident, as a result of the contact in leisurely circumstances between their minds and lives, and those of their teacher. These things—facts to the point, an unforgettable moral, an unpredictable lesson learnt in a few seconds, the play of wit and humour, the slow power of excellent habit, can be seized on by a teacher only if he is not in such a deuce of a hurry to cover his lesson before the bell goes that he either does not see his chance or gives it the brush-off in favour of some triviality which owes its place to his cold-blooded planning and preparation.

But above all, that man who is placed with a class of boys hour by hour, day after day, week in, week out, either comes to love them and see them as his work-mates, in some sense an extension, near and intimate, of his own life speeding by and spending itself on them, or else he has a heart of stone, and ought to become a monumental mason, trading in the carven appearances of grief and respect.

If you are a teacher in a school which specialises at this level, your life is too much a procession of impressions. You have neither time nor opportunity to do your proper work of a pastor, a friend and—in a deep true sense—an equal. Boys take time to get to know a man. Men take time to

get to know every member of a class like so many other selves.

I want to give them time . . . all the time in the school day. Specialisation in Secondary Modern Schools is too often a fraud, and a very expensive one at that.

I am still in front of my class of sixty. I have not forgotten them and will come back to them. But I have one other thing to say which must be said.

You would think, to hear some people talk, that educational salvation lay in the provision of expensive apparatus. Build a fine school with shower-baths, tree-lined playing-fields, and spacious gymnasia and dining-rooms. Supply it with radio sets in every room, with film-projectors and epidiascopes. Set up laboratories full of every kind of apparatus . . . spend a great fortune on it, and there you are.

It depends what you want, of course. Not that you will get a lot of little savants and blue-stockings, all as fat as butter from carefully-planned school meals, and bursting intellectually with all the latest diabolisms of science. But if that is what you want—as against what you get—then of course you will build and equip schools like that.

But if you happened to want decent lovable God-fearing trustworthy folks, estimating truly the estimable when they saw it and shaking their heads with a smile at the phoney when they saw *that*, you would do far better to rent a warm barn, put a blackboard in it and a few seats, and then leave the fulfilment of your hopes to a teacher who knew the spirit and the letter of his trade, *and had himself got the qualities you desired in the children.*

I closed the classroom door. In a thousand factories machines whirled and clanked. Along many a track raced express trains. Down the mines men worked in the darkness. Commercial travellers in countless shops talked sales charm. People with time to do it read *The Times* over breakfast. Men got out of bed with nothing better to do than to prepare entertainment for my pupils and their families. The nation's life banged, hummed and swooped along, and we had nothing

better or worse to do than the first lesson. It was called by us on the timetable Scripture, known in other kinds of schools as Divinity, which is the same thing but seems to come in a better carton. It is now officially called Religious Instruction or R.I. for short, and ordered by law to be taken in all schools.

Whatever you call it, if it is your job to teach it, you had better be convinced about it or else refuse to do it on grounds of conscience.

Already, my class had started work. Around the picture rail above their heads was a kind of frieze composed of white cards on each of which I had printed in heavy black letters the name of one of the great events in English History which belonged to the story of their liberties.

One of the cards said Magna Carta 1215. When the boys came in at nine for the register to be marked, they found already written on the blackboard a few lines of summary of what one of the cards announced. This, while they answered their names, they copied into their notebooks and memorised. One day my friend R. E. Miles, His Majesty's Inspector, one of the best the King ever had, came into the room. He twinkled and nodded at the cards.

"I'll bet they know nothing about those cards," he said.

"Try 'em," I replied, secure in my knowledge.

"You," he said, pointing to Joe Verity. "What do you know about the Great Charter?"

Joe tolled off what he had memorised, and sat down feeling he had done pretty well.

"Oho," said Miles, grinning. "He's merely learnt it off like a parrot."

"That's right," I said, nettled to a rash of indignation. "What else should he do?"

Miles shrugged eloquently.

"He may be a parrot," I said, "but he's not a wholly ignorant one. He's got to be a democratic parrot, and although you know and I know and he knows he couldn't care less about a dead king who's a lot better dead, or a lot of barons who were grinding their own battleaxes, either he knows those facts

or he doesn't. I think it's my job to see that he does know them, whether he likes it or not, and anyway, he started real work at the time of starting and wasn't having a gossip while the register was marked, which would have been the action of a less useful creature than an educated democratic parrot. And he isn't a parrot either. He's a very decent sort of a schoolboy with a nasty suspicion that most of my stock-in-trade is more to keep me in business than to do him good, or maybe it will pay a dividend in the kingdom of his Heaven when he's earning fifty bob a week and smoking Woodbines. He can't see that it does much for him today, *but meanwhile, he's done what he was told a hundred per cent successfully, at the right time and in the right way, so we don't grudge him the wages of righteousness. Or do we ?*"

"All right, lad," said Miles, grinning away in his Yorkshire fashion, "don't get excited. He was very good."

"I should say so," I observed, looking with heated and conditioned admiration at poor old Joe Verity, smiling smugly at his success there in his half of the dual desk which was a little inconvenient for two big boys, but which relieved the rate and tax payers to some extent, being markedly cheaper than two singles.

Yesterday, as usual, the two class monitors had seen to it that every boy had a Bible ready on his desk for this my first lesson of the day. Now you can take Religious Instruction in several ways. First, you can say :

"Put those Bibles away, and let's get on with Arithmetic. Some of you need to know how to find the area of a circle more than you need salvation, and that's saying a good deal."

Or you can treat the subject as a branch of history and secularise it fully. This lets you out of ever committing yourself in front of the boys to any belief, but it has the disadvantage that your teaching is dead, for really there is no particular reason why you should tell a lot of English boys about the journeys of St. Paul, unless indeed you think his journeys were supremely necessary.

Yesterday morning, I told the boys to turn to chapter six

of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. There it says, at verse nine :

After this manner therefore pray ye :

Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Let us be clear that the syllabus of Religious Education laid down by the Education Committee prescribed a great amount of material from which a teacher could make his choice, according to the needs, abilities and available time of his pupils, not to say his own theological knowledge. The chapter I mention was the place we had reached and was the correct starting point for the morning. It was not merely what I felt like taking, though I was ready enough to do so.

So, the Lord's Prayer. Now you can't talk about a prayer without talking about prayer. It would be like teaching the boys how to write a letter without mention of the Post Office or the recipient. Now look. I took on myself the responsibility, in the name of this Christian nation, and at its behest, of addressing these sixty boys, in the authority of my own beliefs and experience, on the subject of prayer. Whether you would have approved or not, at soon after nine o'clock, while you were about your own business, I spoke as earnestly as I could to my class on this matter ; in your name, for it is you who commission me, reward me, and authorise me.

This is what I said, with all the force and eloquence I could gather, with every illustration I could recall, both personal and heard of. I neglected no aid, no art, no device, no turn of phrase which might colour my presentation or dig its message deeply in the defenceless minds before me, shackled by my discipline into no reply, bound in the chains of a nation's traditional beliefs, handicapped by their own inexperience. And this is a summary for you of what I said to them :

God is everywhere. In this room and outside it. In your hearts and lives. Whether you know it or not, or knowing it, ignore it, it makes no difference. Moreover, He is your Father, and wants your well-being. Also, He is all-powerful. Prayer is only talking to Him. You can pray anywhere ; not only on your knees. The Bible tells us of people who walked and

talked with God. So can you. I know for a simple and scientific fact that God hears and answers prayer. You can talk to Him as you do to your family and friends. *Here in this chapter is a prayer that everybody learns. It says here in the Bible that we are to pray like this, because to have a pattern set by Christ is to be right and like other Christians.* Prayer isn't magic and it isn't conjuring. It isn't a way of getting what you want, or scoring off people who you think don't pray. It's simply talking to a friend who's there all the time with you. The Bible says that God is nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet. So He is because He is inside you as well as outside. So pray as you talk and breathe, because it's just as natural and necessary.

What frightens me, and ought to frighten you, is that the boys would have listened to a black message with the same stillness and attention. If I had my way, I would bring teachers into their work with the same ceremony and solemnity as a priest or a Member of Parliament or a high servant of the State. I would require of them oaths of devotion and integrity, administered and taken in the presence of the community they had come to serve. I would take the opportunity of impressing on the teacher as well as his pupils and the people of his district the high responsibilities of his office, and the regard in which its faithful discharge ought to be held.

What usually happens is that the new man is led to his form-room by his headmaster, who, according to temperamental variation, may either make some gracious remarks by way of introduction, or may briefly say :

"This is Mr. Trampleasure, your new teacher. Mind you treat him better than you did Mr. Scarce. And while I'm here, let me say that some of you had better signalise the occasion by getting your hair cut. All right. I'll leave you to get to know them, Mr. Trampleasure. You'll soon do that."

The clock in my classroom was approaching ten minutes to ten. I brought my Scripture lesson to a close, and hurried to my own room. In my absence, the monitors would collect

~~Up the~~ Bibles, put them away in the cupboard, and set about preparations for the Arithmetic lesson. The others would have a quick break and a chat while they put on shoes for the Physical Training period now due. In my room, I swiftly changed into white flannel trousers, pulled my tie off and left my shirt collar open, slipped on a pair of rubber-soled shoes, and was ready for my next job.



BACK in the classroom, I stood in front of the boys, and gave the order to move out into the playground. Out there, I became for the next quarter of an hour their Physical Training Instructor. No hardship this. No bore. Nothing incongruous about it that either I or the boys could see. The Ministry of Education Physical Training Syllabus offered us a table for the day which gave exercises, a quick game or two and a little simple apparatus work.

The boys liked it all right. So would anyone who had just listened to a sermon of something over half an hour. Why did I enjoy it? Well, yesterday, I was not much older than my pupils and relished a vigorous quarter of an hour with them. Besides, this period fitted sweetly into a programme that depended on variety with tension, and—I don't know how you would have felt—I heartily enjoyed swinging a group of sixty healthy boys through the ordered movements involved. Yes, I know. A quick-change artist. One minute a preacher

The next a gymnast. Well, I explained all that, and I was both trained for this sort of variety, and paid to do it. You should be pleased that I also liked it.

At the end of the period—five past ten—the boys marched smartly into their room again. On every desk was the boy's exercise book for Arithmetic, his textbook, pen, ruler, blotting-paper, given out by the monitors before they too joined us for P.T. A class of sixty, more like a congregation than a class, is so large a unit that your organisation of small matters has to be very close, or you would lose time from every lesson. The two monitors had a place for everything, counted all books and apparatus back again, and it was a matter of routine to report to me if anything was short.

"Two pens short, sir."

A glance at the class from my seat at my desk.

"Find them."

A stooping of heads to the ground, a raising of desk lids, and two pens forthcoming.

"Right. Now we can go."

A schoolmasterly fuss? A pedantic attention to trifles? A parade of the microscopic? We are after all talking of the ratepayers' property, and it's not a bad lesson that what was given out to the workmen must be returned to the store.

Yesterday, the Arithmetic lesson, by the textbook followed, was all that business about the cost of papering rooms and covering floors with linoleum. Ill content with a straightforward job of papering and carpeting, the middle-class author of the book had to have borders round the floor varnished, excrescences on the walls dealt with, and of course a variety of doors and windows to be avoided.

This was where my class fell neatly and naturally into intellectual grades. Not wishing to bore the mathematical smarties, I said :

"If there's anyone here who knows how to do this exercise, let him get on with it and ask for help if he wants it."

Forthwith half a dozen boys grabbed their pens and set busily about the mournful enterprise of costing up the papering

and carpeting of these apartments of the fantasy. Genius is precisely as rare in the classroom as it is outside the school; but notable ability is not so scarce, and ought never to be held back. If you insist on having a pace of the class, it will of course be the pace of the slowest, and then you find yourself saddled with two burdens, like the ass you are. The first burden ye have always with ye—the weaker brethren who need to have the story told often. The other, if you must have it by treating a class of sixty or forty or thirty as if it had only one head, is a collection of bored youths who look for nefarious occupation while they wait for the back end to catch up. Set the quick ones free and they'll work themselves if not to shadows at least to progress at their own rate.

One year I had a top class of the usual sixty boys who would not tolerate education by talk. Now I love talking—yes, let me say it—and up to that time had relied on talk very heavily. Talk, if it's well done, is a method of hypnotising the class into attention and success; but beyond that, it is very much more satisfying to an egotistical teacher, and gives him a clearer sense of having *done* something for his money. It fires him, of course, and so he can go home at the end of the day and say to the little wife:

"Gosh, I'm tired. Absolutely worn out. And some people say we've got a soft job."

Thus, the teacher is at one with the plumber, the farm-labourer, the coal-heaver, the road-mender, the steel-worker in that they are all justified by being tired. That's a little doubt that sometimes lurks in the schoolmaster's mind. Is it possible that ~~his~~ job is the cinch that other people seem to think it is? Well, maybe it is, he sometimes reflects. But the alibi is being tired, the same as any other chap; and there's nothing so fatiguing as talk, talk, talk for hours every day. To the man, I mean, as well as the boys.

This particular class, however, wouldn't have it. They declined to be stunned, crashed, charmed or hypnotised by my eloquent wiles. The more I soared, the harder they lay down in the valley. The hotter became my rhetoric,

the cooler became their reception of it. They didn't yawn, you might have done. I wouldn't have put up with that, at in any case my slightly wounded vanity would have seized upon so righteous an excuse for vengeance. They didn't walk out because they couldn't in the circumstances. No. They just sat. Impenetrable, unmoved, unmoving. They sat, and we were getting nowhere; nowhere at all, not even to loggerheads, because even I could see that I had a new problem, and that it was up to me to find a solution. It took me a little time to come to the belief, so clayily thrust at me, that I had a class which could not be taught by my hitherto infallible methods. A little time, too, to settle for a fresh method which would do the trick.

"Boys," I said to them, when I had a solution I thought might work; and I said these words with something rather less than entire goodwill. "Boys, I can't teach you. You won't have it. I'm done for. Beaten. Finished."

These observations they would have cheered if they had for one moment of time believed them. But whatever boys don't know, in the grievous depths of their inexperience and natural ignorance, they soon catch up with schoolmasters, and can sort into three heaps everything we have to say. The first heap is that sort of stuff, as corny as a lead-in to a popular song on radio. The second is the stuff which is only too credible, part of the scheme of things in school and backed by the ever-present authority of the master, which may be silent and invisible, but broods about the place like the spirit of the jungle. The third heap is that noble stuff, unforgettable and endearing, which reveals that a schoolmaster is also a man. You notice I call it all stuff, and so it is, for the relationship of teacher and pupil is artificial and stuff-y; and can only be redeemed by the endless humanity and tolerance of boys on the one hand, and the ever-vigilant sense of its difficulties by the master.

So they waited for something I said which might be put on to the second heap. It came along all right. I wagged my record book at the class.

"This book," I said, "contains a forecast of the work we have to do each week. I write it up on Friday for the coming week." I opened it and showed it to them, though it was a gesture only. Except for the boys in the front row, abnormal powers of vision would have been required to see what was on the pages. "I enter here the work, the pages or chapters of the textbooks, the subjects for essays, the lot. You won't have me as teacher. Let's see if you can teach yourselves." More corny stuff, they told me with their eyes. Get on to the point.

I closed the book and put it down on my desk.

"I'll give every boy a copy of that forecast on Monday mornings. You can have your exercise books and notebooks in your desk, and help yourselves to textbooks as you want them. If you fancy doing the whole of the arithmetic for the week in an hour, it's up to you. Or the history . . . or the English . . . do as you like. As for me, I'm here to give a hand if you want it . . . and will condescend to ask for it."

It worked. And so did I; harder than I ever had before. But they liked having it that way, which, after all, was a way of treating sixty boys as if I had only one pupil. Nice for them, but you have to do a bit of multiplication to see what it did to me.

But yesterday morning I was still doing the job by talking and mass-attack. I made drawings on the board, I showed a little model of a room that opened out into a long rectangle, and I mowed down on a first withering fire of talk the average boys who could get the hang of a thing at one go. They took their pens and set about doing the exercises.

Then I directed my fire at the third lot, who had to be shot at least a couple of times before they realised they'd been hit at all. One by one, they gave me that look and word which told me that what had existed as a pattern of thought in my mind had passed safely into their heads.

At last I was left with a busy class and three doteworthy characters who had triumphantly emerged from the battle of wits without understanding one word of what I had said. This

is the point at which forced calm is the correct procedure. A rather heavy and slightly portentous civility crept into my speech. I was giving a very passable impersonation of a barrel of dynamite got up as a schoolmaster.

"Now then, boys," I said, "gather round the blackboard. Forget everything I've said." There was no need to forget, for friend memory had not yet been involved in the unequal struggle. I knew that, but one must use a cliché as one uses an aspirin, to reduce both effort and temperature. The effort was still to come. The temperature I already had. The three boys did not know how to carpet a room or paper a wall in the total absence of all the physical elements involved; but they recognised barrels of soft-spoken dynamite when they saw them, and knew how to handle them too. Into their manner came an exquisite care, a low-voiced courtesy, an avoidance of any movement likely to attract unfavourable notice, like three smallish men penned up in a cage with a baboon concerning whose sanity there was room for doubt.

I saw with a tender amusement of which they knew nothing the assumed eagerness with which they placed themselves in advantageous positions before the blackboard, that they might appear resolved to miss no tittle of the valuable message about to be vouchsafed yet again, on highly personal and preferential terms. I noted the perfection of their acting technique as they arranged their faces in expressions of rapt and close attention. . We were evidently all set.

"Now," I said, in a low voice, so as not to disturb the saved workers in the desks, "we'll start all over again."

After several goes, in which our behaviour changed from dynamite and baboons to persons carrying out intricate gyrations on extremely thin ice, two of the trio began to get the idea. At first venturing a reply or a question with the muscles tensed as if to race away to safety should the gambit go wrong, the two began to gain confidence, and at length went back to their desks to begin the process of getting most of the examples wrong without sinning against the light.

I gazed at the solitary survivor, the boy who was still with

me, unscathed by the hail of teaching which had gone on till none but he could take it and still live on in a happy ignorance. I made common cause with him, for were we not both suffering ?

" Well, Casson," I said, " it's pretty tough, isn't it ? " .

" Yes, sir," he agreed, with a quick sweet smile. He was an untidy boy, with a disregard for care in his dress that amounted to a deliberate characterisation. His hair was unkempt, and his tie like a blue rope round his neck. He looked out upon life with a cheerful acceptance of its complexity and his own simplicity. He was swiftly responsive to a waft of friendliness and humour. In tribulation he would weep with a certain hearty enjoyment and then finish with it and move up to life again after this grievous but brief abandon.

So there he stood, helpless in the situation, nothing disconcerted in a world full of incomprehensible chumps who wanted to paper rooms that didn't exist and cover floors you couldn't so much as stand on ; there he stood and waited on my mercy to deliver him, if I could, from the moment and the problem. If England said Bill Casson must paper invisible rooms, well, let the leader get on with it, and let him follow as best he could, through smiles and tears as might be. For himself, I know, he had long come to the conclusion that such refinements of civilisation were not made for his enjoyment. Boys did at last leave school, did they not ? Others had. Why not Bill Casson ?

Have you ever had to try and find some bridge between your mind and another's, look about for a board, a rope, a thread, anything that would take the weight of your thought ?

While Bill Casson waited, I invented. I was like a man this side of an African river, trying to throw a cord across to the hands of Bill Casson on the other side, while the dark stream rolled between us, mysterious and problem-ridden. In my mind, I ran to and fro on the bank, seeking new means of getting in touch. I moved back into the hinterland, so to speak, of Bill's education, to find something we could hold on to. Or—similes crowd in faster than solutions—I behaved

like a dentist grimly at work on Bill's academic tooth, drill away to find a sound bit on to which to fix my new filling.

The terrible thing was that Bill was not a daftie. The we stood, a schoolmaster using every resource, and a briggay, sympathetic boy, only too willing to seize the other end of the rope, if he could so much as see it, or to have his tooth filled, regardless of pain, if it would please me—me, with my senseless and touching preoccupation with these sums about rooms and carpets.

Quite suddenly, I could do no more. Bill wouldn't have it. No. Couldn't have it. My vain resolve that he should not overcome my teaching power with his inability, my almost impregnable belief that there was nothing my speech could not explain, both these things collapsed before my diminishing hope and my increasing sense of the humanity and true reality of the boy.

"Casson," I said, exhausted and without further ammunition, "are there any sums in that book that you think you could get right?"

Bill's face lit up. His sympathy came out for a moment towards me and then vanished beneath his overwhelming delight at his reprieve. He swiftly turned to a page of long tots, involving nothing more than accurate addition. Good, you know. I admit that. But not what I had actually wanted.

"These, sir," he said, pointing to them.

"Go, then, Casson," I said wearily, "and feast on success, while I taste the bitter draught of failure."

In spite of this crack, and for all the hope it may have inspired in Casson's heart that I would for the future leave him alone to do long tots in a fool's paradise, I would return to the attack; and he would tag along at the class's tail, never either learning how to do these absurd sums or failing in his cheerful and affectionate tolerance of my stubborn resolve to explain the inexplicable or unscrew the inscrutable.

A bell rang loudly in the corridor, wielded with liberating zeal by Reggie Firth, a boy whose exquisite features were a continual twinkle, sustained alike by wonderful health,

enormous good nature and considerable academic success obtained with notable ease. The period, said the bell, was over, and there would now be a quarter of an hour's break.

Swiftly, the monitors cleared everything up, began preparing for the next lesson, which was English, and dumped on my desk sixty arithmetic books to be marked and returned with all speed to the boys. This job I should fit in as occasion allowed during the day, for marking arithmetic is not a task of serious dimensions. The sixty English books which would be handed to me at the end of the next period would be a very different proposition. I should have to deal with them after school. I wouldn't dare to leave them, for each day added something to their contents, and the prospect of facing two or three days' work by sixty boys was frightening enough to ensure that I would be punctual in doing the job each day.

My class then went out and joined all the rest of the boys in the yard. To me, the spectacle of what hundreds of boys do at break to amuse themselves in a limited space is always fascinating. Scores of activity patterns display themselves, each and every one deserving amused inspection. The yard is the best example of living and let live that it is possible to find. Dozens of ball games develop, with the balls and players running across each other's lines of movement. Boys rush across each other's orbits without collision and without taking any notice, apparently, of each other. Over there some clumsy optimists begin a game of leap-frog; against the wall, a crowd begin to play that ancient favourite Spanish Fly. Small groups of two or three boys gather and, with their heads together, indulge in a private conversation at the top of their voices. A solitary individual drifts about alone, looking appreciatively about him, and sucking one of those nameless delicacies mounted on a wooden stick, in a rapture of the gourmet's pleasure.

All arrangements and disputes are made and carried on in a tumult of shouting, which, at first defensive against the general din, is at last the necessary norm of conversation.

The actual scene is a montage of the expressions of the human

face. Quiet smiles, sly grins, laughter, intensity, threat, anger, disgust, near-tears, all are there, shifting, changing in the hubbub of young voices, as every soul tolerates the multitude, and the multitude absorbs each individual.

Sometimes a general pattern supersedes the varied ones when those seasonal fashions of employment come upon the boys. The best example is Conker Time, when the duels of the horse-chestnuts are in progress all over the yard.

But whatever the season, there is that healthy hearty noise, as significant in its changes and modulations—to the school-master—as the varied sounds of the hive are to the bee-keeper. When the boys are happily and normally engaged about their games, the sound is like the sea, regular in its undulations. Now and again there is a day when its vague and varied sound, arising from concentration on a hundred objects, changes. It drops for a moment almost to silence and then rises again to an excited monotone, the actual sound moving like a swiftly blown cloud of noise across the yard.

All is obvious to the experienced ear in the staff room. There is a fight on, and the duty master hurries to the spot where, in the middle of a great happy crowd, two boys are dealing with some dispute in the old-fashioned way.

What happens then depends on the man who chances to be on duty. If it is Mr. Graham, the Games master, he will send for boxing gloves and have the fight continued under proper conditions. If it is Mr. Preen, who spent a year as a member of the Police Force before becoming a teacher, he will cope with the matter on the "move along there" principle. If it is fierce Mr. French, he will bend a stern look on the crowd and wave it away, pull the combatants apart ungentily, and march them, somewhat crestfallen, to his room for instruction in the art, not of self-defence, but of self-control.

At the end of my arithmetic lesson yesterday, when my boys had gone out to play in the yard, I went along the corridor towards my room, where I would change out of flannels, and where Rex Lancer would have put a cup of coffee and some biscuits on my desk. Very seldom indeed do I reach my own

door without being stopped by someone. Short though the break, and very welcome, it is a certainty that somebody having business with me will make it shorter.

Yesterday it was first Oliver Wheeler, a fair-haired quiet boy, tall for his age, which was twelve, and with the sort of shyness that would take him through his school life without exchanging more than a dozen personal words with me unless I made occasion. Now he came towards me in the corridor and I saw that he was in tears. He did not speak, but merely showed that he wished me to notice him. The reason was apparent at a glance. The sides of his face were swollen. He was a fine case of mumps.

Infectious diseases make schoolmasters jump to it. I told him I would send him home in a car and that he must go to bed and have his parents send for the doctor. I gave orders for the contacts to be rounded up, and I informed the Medical Officer. After that, I relaxed into a pious hope.

Oliver was out of the school and on his way home in seconds, and while the little whirl of activity which my orders had caused was still in full course, down the corridor came Frank Plews, the middle-aged secretary of the Parents' Association. He knew what the hour of playtime was, and chose the time of his visit. Tall, broad and placid, he bore down on me unaware of the hectic moments just passed.

"Can I have a word with you?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied, "but come into my room, and let me change and have my coffee."

At my door stood young Jeremy Stake, a particular friend of mine, because he was a lovely singer and the mainstay of the school choir. And not only that; he had a mature sense of humour, and a quaint way of behaving like a grown-up on social occasions. We understood one another very well, as many a twinkling glance from him would show.

"What do you want?" I asked, my hand on the door-knob.

My question had a sinister import, for those who stood uneasily there had special and disagreeable business with me.

"Sent for the cane, sir," he replied in dismal tones.

I used a phrase common in hopeful moments amongst friends. But this was not a hopeful moment.

"I'll see you later," I said, holding open the door for Mr. Plews.

Adults take a certain ghoulish pleasure in the corporal punishment which they are not going to receive. It appears to have a certain salty flavour in their minds. Mr. Plews nodded towards the unseen Jeremy when we were in my room.

"He's for it, is he?"

What a gustatory tone. I knew that Mr. Plews would tell me any minute something of the excessive rigours of his school-days, when schoolmasters were men of iron wielding rods of steel on what, I infer, must have been skins of the toughest leather.

"Well," I replied, "I haven't heard his tale yet."

Mr. Plews raised his eyebrows. It was all part of the microscopic inward feast; but I knew that such discourse as there was on this point would take the form of a justification of beating, a raising of hallowed memories of torture, and no small censure of me as a public servant if I did not reveal the most bloodthirsty readiness to whack my young friend in an effort to live up to the largely imaginary past.

"What!" cried Mr. Plews. "You don't mean that if he pitches you a good enough tale, you'll let him get away with it?"

"How would you view it," I asked, "if you were charged with an offence, and were promptly sentenced and punished without so much as a chance to say what you wanted to say?"

"That's different. He's only a boy."

"So what?"

I picked up my cup of coffee, skinned over and no longer hot.

"All boys are rascals," said Mr. Plews. "And if they don't deserve the cane at one time, they do at another."

Now Mr. Plews was a large, kindly, amiable man, a just—even an indulgent father. But the moment corporal punishment—of other people's children—came into his mind, he

turned into a standard tough Briton, ready to swear that he was the man he was, because his behind had been well banged in his boyhood, and to declare that the flag of Empire floated on a flagstaff made of pure cane. Ready to shed his blood in a great war to defend freedom, the constitution and the rule of law for grown-ups, he was equally ready to deny the lot to an individual of school age. How extreme ; but the issue of corporal punishment produces extremists anyway. It would have been just as easy to find a character who held that to cane anybody was the sin against the Holy Ghost, and a well-tanned bottom was the promise of a wrecked and anti-social life. My own theory was between these two views, but not in fact on the same line as they were at all.

The immediate point was that I had no intention whatever of denying young Jeremy his rights in common law. I would, when Mr. Plews departed, hear all that Jeremy liked to say, for I did not yet know so much as the nature of the alleged offence. How else could I hope to teach him or any boy some respect for the law ? A purist might even question my right to hold him in durance at my door while I conducted an interview with Mr. Plews, for the loss of the boy's playtime, awaiting the slow operations of justice, was in itself some sort of punishment. You would no doubt have thought so if you had been in his state of mind, and hold that hell is the prospect of hell and not hell itself.

I gave Mr. Plews a cigarette and lit one myself, nodding at the clock as I did so.

"Well, to business," I said. "I'm on duty again in five minutes."

"Right," said Mr. Plews, dismissing—I don't know how reluctantly—the thought of the young rascal at my door. "It's this troublesome woman Redditch. The others on the committee have had about as much of her as they can stomach. If she isn't got rid of, you'll have the rest of them resigning."

I knew all about Mrs. Redditch. I'd had my brushes with her often enough. She was a thoroughly good-hearted hard-working woman, with a passion for her own way and a direct

way of trying to get it which I would have disliked enough in a man ; and more so in a woman, who ought to know how to work her will on people without losing feminine charm. Women have weapons enough for such a technique, and those who throw them away in favour of more masculine methods deserve not only failure, but the contempt of men into the bargain. In her more robust moods, Mrs. Redditch got both.

She was, for example, as anti-corporal punishment as Mr. Plews said he was pro. If her Wilfred—a boy spoken of by the staff as a proper little devil, and spoiled into the bargain—ever got the caning he spent hours canvassing, Mrs. Redditch would be in school the very next session, airing her views on the subject, charging the teacher with gross unfairness, disciplinary incompetence, and downright sadism. She would also assert, at every other sentence, that she was not going to have it and that was all there was to it.

Whenever a new master joined the staff, I knew what the drill would be. He would without fail fall across Wilfred in record time, because Wilfred was the sort of boy you couldn't miss in a sea of new faces. He stuck out like a rock—a restless, talkative, indolent and provocative rock. After a period of time varying with the resolution and forbearance of the teacher, Wilfred would catch it.

One morning I heard from my room a conversation of particular vigour going on in the sunshine of the yard. I listened. It was a talk with no points of reconciliation going on between Mr. Yates, a new master, and Mrs. Redditch. I smiled to myself. So Mr. Yates had found Wilfred a thorn in his side and had plucked him out. I rose and went out of the front door. I bore down on the couple in the yard.

"Have you come, Mrs. Redditch, to complain that Wilfred has been punished?" I asked with a sternness I did not feel but thought I ought to show.

"Yes, I have," replied Mrs. Redditch, as disconcerted by my appearance as a conjuror detected in an old trick by a former client.

"Mr. Yates," I said firmly, "go back to your class. Mrs. Redditch, go away."

The antagonists turned on their respective heels, and vanished, leaving me in possession of the empty air, feeling myself a trifle disconcerted as a man may when, ready for battle, he sees the opposing forces melt away.

Another day—it was in the early afternoon—I went in to the classroom where Wilfred sat with his classmates. Teaching was at a standstill, and to my annoyance and astonishment, I saw the ample back of Mrs. Redditch bending over Wilfred at his desk. A family colloquy was evidently in full blast, in its importance bringing to a halt the main business of the school.

"Mrs. Redditch!" I cried sharply. The teacher and his class gazed with expectation at the coming storm.

She straightened up and turned towards me.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hughes," she said in her most charming and guilty manner.

I explosively ignored this trifle of courtesy.

"What are you doing in this classroom?" I demanded.

She looked enchantingly like a schoolgirl caught in some delicious misdemeanour. I nearly weakened and forgave her unheard; but memory of her other crimes added to this heinous one gave me strength. She *must* be punished.

"I've got to go out for a few hours," she explained, "so I came in to give Wilfred the door-key so that he can get in when he goes home."

"Then you should have come to me and I would have dealt with the matter," I said loudly, for the boys would hardly have forgiven me if the back row could not have heard sentence. "You must leave the school at once, and don't come here again without first seeing me."

I went to the door and held it open in a compulsive invitation. Without a word she held up the key and looked her question. The conference had apparently not got past the terms of reference stage.

"You may give it to the boy," I said, still holding the door open.

She hurriedly handed Wilfred the key, and then walked quickly out of the door. As she passed me she spoke.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hughes," she said.

Well, really. And so submissive. What a woman.

"Good afternoon," I replied, and closing the door on the outside, I watched her go along the corridor and vanish through the front door.

You may think that I was making an unnecessary fuss. If you do, I must remind you that your children might have been there, and it was my duty to protect those who were against needless disturbances. In this duty, the law supports me, giving me authority to order out of the school any person unlawfully there.

On the other hand, I must add that when I next saw Mrs. Redditch, she was charm itself, and showed neither ill-will nor even strain at memory of the incident. But nothing stopped her from trying to dominate new situations and persons; hence the indignation of the Committee of the Parents' Association. According to Mr. Plews, either Mrs. Redditch must go, or everybody else would. Also according to Mr. Plews, it was up to me.

"Let well alone till the Annual General Meeting," I suggested. "Then don't elect her again."

Mr. Plews shook his head.

"That's not till January," he said. "That won't do. They want her out now, and what's more they're going to have her out now. Or else."

We were both thinking the same thought.

"There's a committee meeting tonight," I said.

Mr. Plews nodded slowly.

"Yes," he said. "That's why I'm here. To warn you."

The bell rang outside to announce the end of playtime. In the yard, Mr. French blew his whistle and there was the great stillness followed by the run to lines, and I heard Mr. Santaya go the piano in the corridor and give an arpeggio like a merry laugh, an unofficial musical remark. I noted that it must be the beautiful day, for although a contented man,

he was anything but a gay one. The door opened and Rex Lancer came in to take away my coffee cup. I knew that although there were boys who would be sorry to hear the whistle and know that play was at an end, I had one neighbour in the house next to the school who would be glad in a grim way. That one was Mr. Pierce, my own dentist. His surgery was divided from the school yard by a wall and the width of his garden path. A small boy, but for the wall and the window, could have thrown a ball with little effort into the bowl beside the dental chair. I was truly sorry for Mr. Pierce, though not so sorry for him as he was for himself. It must have happened daily that just when he was doing a little delicate drilling, or getting ready to extract a tooth, my boys would come out at break and fill the air with a din loud enough to startle the most phlegmatic patient or drown the cries of the most nervous one.

Mr. Pierce was, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, a gentleman, and he was an old Harrovian. If I could have wheeled the entire school away to a new site far from his surgery, I would have done it for affection and admiration of him. What I could not do was either to deprive the boys of their break, or order them to turn it into a Quaker meeting. In this latter possibility, Mr. Pierce and I were not of one mind. How he tolerated this nuisance of our noise I cannot tell; or how he remained charming and courteous to me when he must have fumed every day of his life. The only thing he ever allowed himself to say, with a smile to soften its possible asperity, was that if he and his contemporaries at school had made that terrible din, they would have had six of the best. It was a remark to which I could find no reply, but regarded it as a most justifiable letting-off of steam—a tiny spurt of steam which only a saint could have kept in and only a great gentleman would have kept so small.

To him, of course, the sound of hundreds of boys at play in a small yard was like a conspiracy against science and dental technique, deliberately conceived and executed. To me, it was as proper and natural as the sound of the sea.

I could not move the boys away to distant parts of my premises, because there weren't any distant parts not already full of boys. He could not move his surgery to the other side of his house because it was one of those places tall and long, but not wide. Continued good relations with him were a tribute alike to his nature and to the value of his education.

"See you tonight, then," said Mr. Plews, at the door, with a note of you-know-what-you've-got-to-do in his voice as he went, casting a glance of prophetic gloom at Jeremy Stake, who looked wide-eyed at him and gave a kind of involuntary wriggle about his waist-line.

"Come in, Stake," I said.

Jeremy walked in with that stiff care which tells of a war between will and inclination. I closed the door and sat at my desk. Jeremy stood in front of me with his hands behind. He looked at me like a personal friend between whom and me a grave misunderstanding had wiped the former happy relationship even out of our eyes.

"Who sent you?" I asked.

"Mr. Bryan, sir."

"What for?"

"I laughed out loud in class."

Mr. Bryan again. This young man, not more than twenty-three, was a graduate recently down from his University. This was his first job, and when Jeremy Stake mentioned his name, I felt a mental frown gather inside me. Outwardly I continued to look like a judge at the boy, but the fact of the situation was that I didn't approve at all of Mr. Bryan. If I were honest with myself I had to admit that I didn't even like him. Nevertheless, professional considerations obliged me to appear loyal to him at all points, including such an interview as this. Stake must not be permitted to see even a shadow of implied criticism of the master in my manner. One of the reasons for my disapproval was that such considerations did not worry Mr. Bryan on his side. He had made it clear that he despised his pupils and his colleagues. No one could, after the shortest talk with him, entertain any delusions about Mr. Bryan. He

t that he was far too good for such a job as he held with , even if any kind of teaching was not beneath him. He ustrated, with a wealth of scorn, his conviction of the profound wrongness of our methods, and the unsuitability of ost of us for even the humble work we had undertaken.

This is conduct one may expect from a genius ; and it ould have been all right in Mr. Bryan if he had been one. it there was nothing that he did right. He could not control hold the interest of a class. He could not engage them appily in a task, nor evoke a spark of respect and regard for himself. When he found order, he quickly reduced it to chaos, nd looked everywhere for the reason except at Mr. Bryan, he only true begetter of it. In class, he was a dismal failure, n the staff room a haughty and aloof critic, and under criticism himself, he was supercilious and inattentive, bearing it to the xtent of just staying long enough for its last word to pass him y unheard.

It was not wholly unreasonable of him to damn the entire system and those who ran it, for he tried all methods and ailed at each and every one. He bullied and the boys revolted. He caned them and started a civil war. He appealed to them nd they laughed. He explained the principles of free discipline nd they turned the room into a free-for-all.

It was as clear as spring-water to Mr. Bryan what all his xperience proved. He saw with a terrible clarity that the hool was rotten to the core, that the teachers were hardened rofessional cynics, and that I was a small-time bore mounted n a little hill of corruption. He really felt that it would have een fortunate for education that he had come into it, if the ask of reform had not been so hopelessly large and he, Galahad ough he was, with only the strength of ten.

The terrible thing about the situation was that this humour-ss young man honestly and sincerely believed that things ere as he saw them, because, by some defect of his otherwise ood intelligence, he was unable to conceive himself mistaken t anything.

In such a case, it is only too apparent that the man must

go. In teaching, the clouds gather far too long before the storm breaks. Everybody concerned hopes that the unhappy sinner will take himself off and leave the scene of his own accord. For you may believe that there are few lots more unhappy than to be an inefficient teacher—an adult supposed to be in control of a number of children who hour by hour heap the most excruciating humiliations and petty degradations on him.

If you work with men and fail, they will watch your failure with a certain amused compassion. But children rub your nose in your failure, laugh and cheer your downfall, celebrate your incompetence like cannibals, with dancing and devouring, because having no experience, they are likewise without pity.

Mr. Bryan could have learnt his business from half a dozen of his colleagues, but you cannot learn from those you despise ; so he staggered along, knowing that he alone was right and that his sufferings were those of the misunderstood genius in a wrong *milieu* ; while I waited to see if he would spare me the painful necessity of having him moved to another post, by himself giving us up for lost, sunk as we were in the complacency of achievement.

With all this in my mind, I looked severely at Jeremy Stake.

“What were you laughing at in class ?” I asked.

The boy hesitated, for he too had some notion of correctness and loyalty. I knew well enough what had happened. There was plenty of humour in it if you had no responsibility for it. The scene in the classroom had probably been enough to make a cat laugh, if it had been an unofficial cat. I remembered one I had witnessed myself, as I passed Mr. Bryan's windows. There was he, trying to teach. I could see his lips moving, but no sound was audible because there was too much sound coming from the boys. At the back of the class, two boys were having a scrap. In the front row, that perky little clown Ribber had made lorgnettes from copper wire and was surveying the teacher with an air of insolent scrutiny which went well with his rather patrician features. Nearly everybody was making some satirical comment in action on Mr. Bryan.

Oh, yes, it was very funny if you were free to laugh ; and at some such scene, Jeremy Stake had seen fit to laugh—as he reported—out loud. Why he alone had been sent to me instead of the whole class is one of those interesting points of situation and personality. Besides, what crime compares with laughing at a man ? Jeremy was still left with my question.

“ I laughed at another boy, sir,” he said, modestly using the singular.

The time was going, and my class would already be in our room, waiting for me. I had to make some decision.

I could of course cane the boy and have done with it. He could not have thought it unfair, because whatever other boys were doing, and whatever the cause, he had in fact laughed out loud in class. But I thought that if anyone deserved punishment it was Mr. Bryan.

“ Go back to your room,” I said. “ Tell Mr. Bryan you’ve seen me, and that I’ll come and see him about you.”

There was no comment on Jeremy’s face as to my judgment.

“ Yes, sir,” he said, and got out of my room very quickly.



As quickly, I followed him and hurried along the corridor towards my classroom to begin my English lesson. On the way I met a very small boy from one of the junior classes, young Jack Harmer, with his mass of glossy dark hair and his

great brown eyes still full of the beliefs and fancies of his nursery days. He stared at me with the awe very small boys reserve for ogres, giants, elephants, God and headmasters. The time was eleven. The boys had only just gone to their rooms after break. Schools are places where nobody can be roaming about silent corridors in lesson-time except headmasters, and nobody can expect not to be challenged. I gave Jack a look with a tenth of a smile in it for his youth and nine-tenths of official enquiry.

"And where are you going?" I asked.

In his fluting voice Jack handed out the truth.

"I've got diarrhoea, sir," he said.

He meant he had an embarrassing looseness, of course, but they all call it that. Conscious of my terrible responsibility should I delay him, I waved him on.

"Don't stop," I said.

He didn't.

In the classroom, my sixty were ready—in varying degrees—for the weekly effort of creative writing. Essay books were on every desk, pens at the approximate alert, and a few people dying to show their prowess to themselves.

I whisked the blackboard over, for on its reverse side—the one not used for all that twaddle about carpeting rooms and so on—were a dozen subjects for the young writers.

I tried to cover, in the twelve topics, the known interests of my class. I always threw in one about the sea for high-spirited humorous Barker, who wanted to be a sailor, thought of little else, and could certainly not write or even talk about much else.

Quite a carnival event, this weekly essay period was. What was required was very easy to state. It was simply that sixty individuals, most of whom would never again, after they had escaped from my clutches, attempt to write anything more serious than a family letter or a business note, were instructed now to compose, on a given subject, a passage of spirited, colourful, amusing and correctly written prose.

Their view of the job was on the whole a little different

from mine. To most of them, it was a part of that ritual of effort which I evidently believed would do them good, and about which there was no option. My attitude towards them was that of a teacher of English confronted by a lot of young litterateurs, to whom I must first reveal and then from whom I must evoke a first-rate craftsmanship.

Because I was myself in a condition of permanent slight intoxication about the power and beauty of language, the colour and flavour of words, I thought it was my duty to introduce the boys to this agreeable intoxicant. Like any other toper, I made no allowance for the sobriety, on this point, of my clients, jovially hated the strict teetotaler in the matter of language, and jollied along the one who showed the slightest leaning towards my favourite tippie.

There are drunkards worse than I, however. I have heard of masters who ask nothing more from their patients than that they should drink deep potations of language, irrespective of trivial nonsense about spelling, grammar and punctuation. The Let-It-Rip school of thought are quite happy with beer, lots of it, hogsheads of it, gallons of it, vats of it. So long as it flows, all is well. The soul spreads herself in a cascade, a waterfall, a deluge of words . . . no, that is much too watery a metaphor. Yet what comes up is not often classy enough to deserve more than the metaphor of beer . . . small beer at that.

If you are one of that school of opinion, all you need do is to say to your class, "Let go, lads. Never mind about full stops and commas. Let your grandmother see to that, for so was she educated in the constipated days of pedantically correct writing. Just write what you like about any of my subjects, or if you don't like them, choose a subject for yourself. Hooray for self-expression. And when I come to read it . . . mark it I shall not, for no man could mark so sodden a mass of error as you will certainly put out . . . when I come to read it, I shall be perfectly happy with the acreage and the good intention. You are not, Heaven be praised, going to be writers. You are going to be men, and it is a

man's business to say what he has to say while he can still hold a breath or a pen. So say it, and to hell with all that boloney about spelling and grammar."

Yes, I know how it is. A boy who is trying to write correctly some passage calling for creative effort is a boy juggling with about five eggs. He has to use imagination, to begin with, a job so hard that most people go through life without trying it. Then he must write neatly, recall his punctuation rules, mind his spelling, watch his grammar, and keep an eye on the clock so as not to run out of time before his inspiration has run dry. Set him free, say the real drunkards, of every egg but one. It's hard enough to keep throwing that up in the air without letting it drop.

Twaddle. Pernicious rubbish. Subversive nonsense. Obtaining the ratepayers' money under false pretences. Deceiving the pupils one is paid to lead in the ways of truth. That's what the Clap-it-down-and-run school of thought is doing. Selling beer for wine.

There were several boys in my class who belonged naturally to this circle of writers, for the sufficient reason that they could do no other. When I came to mark their work, a terrible frenzy used to gather and rise in me. These boys, intending to fulfil all my demands for neat writing, correct punctuation and the rest of it, used to turn in a script so horrifying that I used selfishly enough to begin crying—not literally, you must know; crying with everything but tears—at my doom in having to mark the stuff.

In this business of marking, I had a little ritual, pleasing to me. I liked to see the pile of books on my left hand as I sat at my desk. Before me a large white piece of blotting paper for the book under inspection to rest on so that it would not collect dust, ink, smudges or any foreign bodies on its cover, and a small piece of pink blotting paper for me to dry the red ink marks I should make as I read. I had a pen towards which I felt a habitual preference such as amounted, by Wellsian definition, to love. It was in fact a broken paint-brush of camel hair, on the wooden end of which I had fixed the metal

part of a pen-holder. I had used it for years, and was as fond of it as a man may be of his billiard cue, and if it was missing I would not use another pen, but searched high and low till I found it. When I was using it I felt like a master in the art of marking, swift, neat and consummate. What rot it was ; but only to you ; not to me.

As I marked, I transferred the completed books to a pile on my right hand. I cheated too, for as soon as I knew my class well enough, I used to sort out the pile of books, putting the known good ones on top, and so down the pile to the horrors at the bottom. I thought that marking ought to be a delight, a series of happy discoveries, a vindication of my teaching power, an occasion for praise and congratulation.

Often I would do the marking in the presence of the class, while they got on with other work, and then I would have the creator by my side while I went through his work, not only putting red ink marks on the page, but also commending *viva voce* good phrases and ideas, and correcting in that living way some point where I could give immediate help.

For the routine errors, there was a marking system well known to all teachers of English. A spelling error got a red ink "S" in the margin, a mistake in grammar a "G," in punctuation a "P" and so on.

This was fine till I began to reach the sludge at the bottom of the pile, where errors were so frequent that they made hay of any system. This method of marking rested on the agreeable assumption that one or two mistakes per line of the essay would be the downward limit of error. But there were those amongst us who made nothing of having more mistakes in a line than there were words, and who—if such a gift could win prizes—might have made a living out of dropping more bricks than anyone in ten counties.

Only two things in the school life were able to threaten me gravely with death by apoplectic rage. One was bad manners. The other was having to mark badly written and evilly composed essays. I could keep my temper beautifully with thickheads who could not understand after a dozen

explanations. I had no difficulty at all in that test of aptitude for teaching which most people claim they have not got, and which they call generically by the name of patience. Pranks, tricks, capers, natural indolence (with which I have the utmost sympathy), stubbornness, all these signs that boys too are human beings brought out in me only a wide tolerance, a desire to sympathise and help. But oh . . . those stinking bad essays.

My apoplectic seizures were entirely my own fault. With my sixty boys, I made a little allowance for gradation of ability in English, but not enough. I made none at all for the bitterly obvious fact, shoved under my nose by everything that happened in the room and in our lives at school, that it was not all a question of the shading-off of ability natural in so large a group, but that there was such a thing as temperamental incapacity for certain kinds of effort. The very boys who used—innocently and sweetly enough—to arouse these vast gouts of black blood in me, could have come to my house and done with a quiet efficiency a hundred jobs with fuses and painting and gardening and mending which I failed at like a mental defective and had to pay a literary nincompoop-meritus to come and do for me.

All this I knew in cold blood, but when I got down to that last dozen of essays, this salutary knowledge used to leave me. I stared at the scruffy smudgy page, the awful writing, the infantile incompetence and its very ugliness used to fill my soul with a cavernous despair. I longed to wipe the vile offence against taste from off the page of the lovely universe. It seemed to me to be an insult to the stars and the sky, the grass and the trees, to artists and clean linen, to the order and decency common to a parade of the Guards and a railway timetable. I have often groaned and shifted my feet on the ground in an ecstasy of frustration, for the whole point about teaching is that it exists for every boy, not for the bright ones only, and so I should have to go on tackling these artists in literary squalor whether they and I liked it or not. They were my charge no less than Eric Fife, that boy over there

with his strong features, his grasp, his calm employment of a good intelligence, his despatch and his exquisitely neat handwriting, his efficiency without fuss.

With one of the incompetents beside me, I would begin to bubble and flush, and he would look unhappy. Then, the brush-pen in my hand, I would begin to try to read what he had written. To me it was as if the tidy decent lad beside me and the horrible mess in the book were not linked in any but an unlucky diabolical way. I would forget him in the flood of my revulsion against his work. I used to read out in a choking voice the more hideous of his perpetrations, and sometimes, carried away beyond bearing by the hopelessness of doing anything about it or for him, would let myself go, tearing up the book with a roar of rage, and hurling it into the farthest corner of the room.

With quiet and dignified patience, he would bear all this, watching with troubled eyes as the paroxysm reached its climax, enough of an observer to take proper heed of it, not enough of a psychologist to know what that last action meant—the destruction of a world in which I was too vain to live, too anxious to suffer him to inhabit.

The orgasm of vanity and intolerance passed, I would descend slowly to a disturbed calm, and give him a new clean essay book, and with appeals that sounded like imprecations, implore him to take care, at least, to be neat and tidy with this new chance. Then he, on his side, like the Christian he was, would turn in for a few days the best he could do, spidery, ill-formed, but terribly careful writing.

The measure of my disappointment at this level was the gulf between the high and excited hope with which I began each essay lesson and what I found at the bottom of the pile of books. I would not believe that I could not make prose-writers out of fitters and shunters-to-be. So I got what I deserved, and they got what they did not.

Yesterday, I began the essay lesson as I always did. I helped those who wanted help with the choice of a subject. I offered slow starters a sentence with which they could begin.

Young Stanley Moore, with the straight fair hair and the large blue eyes would ask for this help.

"Give me a start, sir," he would say.

He would listen, pen in hand, eyes fixed solemnly on me as I glibly prodded his imagination. Suddenly the spark would work. He would raise his hand to stop me.

"All right," he would say. "Don't tell me any more."

I would know that he was off, and would have given a pound an ounce for his own fancy and sold mine off for a penny a ton if there had been any takers. So I walked round amongst the boys, till every one was away with the job, suggesting high fine words for a swift rolling subject, grey, dark, sombre ones for another theme, red full hearty words, dancing gleaming words, polished glittering words; phrases like a banner fluttering, like a train thundering, like a moon rising, like a crowd laughing; like anything alive and young and hopeful and tuneful and spur-like. As if I were a man with a torch going round of an incendiary purpose, I was not content until I had set alight every mind, even if in a few minutes the native damp of my object had reduced the first flame to a sad-eyed smouldering that called again for the torch.

They were all away now. I glanced at the clock. It was time for another duty. I spoke to the boys.

"I'm going round the classrooms," I said. "I'll look in every now and then. If you're absolutely stuck, either ask Eric Fife, or if that won't do, get on as well as you can till I return."

I couldn't actually say "Sit still till I return," but "Get on as well as you can" was merely officialese for it, because that was what certain of the brethren would do if they did get stuck. Eric Fife could quite well have handled the class for most of what they were likely to ask, for he understood my methods perfectly and his grasp of his own language was fully equal to any demands other boys were likely to make upon him.

But if you think that when I had departed, the boys would

promptly relax into a stolen ease, you are indulging either in cynicism, or in memories of your own mis-spent youth. One day—before Mr. Bryan joined us—I called the staff into my room to see what would happen when the whole school was left unattended for a quarter of an hour. Nothing happened, except silence and a lot of boys getting on with their jobs.

While the staff were with me on that occasion, in came my friend John Skinner, then Assistant Education Officer. He listened with a slow smile on his thin face while I told him what was doing.

“A bit theatrical, isn’t it?” he asked.

Maybe so. If it was, a little more sense of the theatre in the matter of being trusted to get on with the job when the foreman isn’t there might do us all good.

If you are a schoolmaster, you have, like all other workers in their spheres, your own sense of time. I looked at my class bent over their essays, and I knew that for ten minutes or so, all would roll merrily. My first call then should be on Mr. Bryan. I had to see him anyway about Jeremy Stake, and besides, he was a perpetual headache. There was never a right time or a wrong time, according to viewpoint, for visiting his classroom. It was sure to be chaos.

I left the room and walked again down the corridor. If you had wanted to get to Mr. Bryan’s room, I should have told you to follow the noise. Protruding into the silence of the rest of the school, I could hear him carrying on the great work of mis-educating his boys, and—what I could not hear, but only feel when I was with him—blaming everybody and everything for what was happening.

As I went along, with the school all round me, I did a quiet smile to myself, as I often did, at what a joke school architecture is.

This school was in two parts. One was the old building erected by the Church of England perhaps a century before. The architect, comical ass, had paid the church the odd compliment of making the windows an ugly copy of church windows, and I suppose that when some grave clergyman

saw these pointed windows on the plan, he felt that something of godliness had appeared which would not conflict with educational efficiency. Such an enlightened cleric would have been able to envisage the difference between a chapel and a classroom, without actually saying that it is the difference between beauty and ugliness. If he even felt that, the shape of the windows would have composed that little niggle.

The other part of our school had been added in fairly recent times to the order of the Local Education Authority. I thought with a grin of some plump architect, the product of a Grammar School and a Technical College, drawing up a plan in accordance with standard county policy. Large semi-circular windows on the corridor so that the headmaster could do a snoop in passing; tall windows in the outer walls to admit God's light to God's children; block floors to minimise cleaning costs and noise; and a sum of ugliness that nothing, not the passage of time, not the eager hope of the young, not the staleness of custom, could reduce. An ugliness, moreover, not of monstrosity, but of flabbergasting mediocrity.

Some people sneer at the houses other people have erected for themselves in mock Tudor, mock Georgian, mock Gothic, mock this and that. But at least these dwellings have character. I am all for individual fancy, and all against the functional economy of places erected by the State. If I could, I would have the same fancies as people show in their homes expressed in school buildings. Never would I have sneered at having a mock Tudor school, much less a mock Georgian one. I wish that hardly two schools were alike, so that I could be spared the shudder which goes through me whenever, on my travels, I catch unlucky sight of a school. In London, schools are without exception the most horrible sights in the streets. To me at any rate they tell of all that children ought never to see; charity, gas-lit foggy evenings, Podsnaps, dreary lessons, mean public administration, smelly urinals, canes, the clanking of a steely system, record cards, files, dead days, and for God's sake let's leave school. Take a look at the education office and

another at the schools, and span that gulf with excuses, if you can think of any. Education is for children, which is maybe why they have for so long come last on the bill. The teachers, who have a powerful Union of their own, ought to employ architects, or better still, train some of their number to be architects, and then insist on designing schools for themselves and their children.

Perhaps you think that the new schools now going up are all they ought to be. They are a great deal better than anything that has gone before, especially in the number of sanitary and technical gadgets generally, which go into them. But when you visit them, you know there is something vital missing from them. They are, you see, the expressions of a policy formed by adults, and a very good policy it is, as far as it goes. I visited one the other day, as new as paint and very expensive. As I went round, I missed something. While my mind approved, my heart was uneasy. I wished that I could have wished to have the school for myself, but there was this mysterious sense of loss, like standing in a great modern railway station, and not meeting your friend. All right but for one thing. What could it be?

I saw the indoor closets, all white tiles and automatic flushing. Spotless basins there were to wash in, and machines that gave you a disinfected paper towel. A fine dining-room too, with a servery and everything, better than Joe Lyons could do it. A spacious hall, a gymnasium or two, with shower-baths and I don't know what-all.

Could it be that these places are altars raised to the Common Man? Was this school that I saw erected to the Greater Glory of Man? Can it be that piety is missing, and that real beauty only happens when we raise buildings to the Greater Glory of God? Or is it just that nobody can make a school beautiful? Children are, so it ought to be easy.

Of course you do not agree with me at all. You have seen that new school in your district. You went to the opening by the Member of Parliament, and you joined your voice to the cries of "Lovely, isn't it? We never had this when we

went to school. Aren't the children lucky nowadays? They ought to turn out all right."

Well, maybe. You can feed them. You can wish them, and offer them a clean W.C. You can give them sunshine—so much, by the way, that in some new schools, they and their teachers nearly die of the heat on a lovely summer afternoon, for windows are not like meadows, which grace the sunshine and soften it for us with green coolness. But when you have done all that, I do not believe you have given them cause to love the place where they were educated. Oh, yes, they come back in after years to their old school. But so they do in the most dismal East-end school, partly because they are fascinated with their own childhood, partly because they like to feel the gulf between today and yesterday, partly because in spite of everything, they like the people who tried to teach them.

What then would I have? One of three things. The first is a school built, like some in the Cotswold villages, as if it had grown out of the soil on which the children live. The second is a school set up in some beautiful old house, with no violence done to it or the place around it, and as little evidence that it is a school as possible. The third is a school built according to one of those individual fancies . . . mock anything you like, so long as it imitated some form of beauty, and was not drawn up by a distant architect with a pipe and every intention of getting on in the service of his Council.

And let the beauty of such a school be a monument of man's piety of intention, a sign of his belief that education is carried on in the service of God.

These would look as if they belonged. But most schools—old or new—look just what in fact they are—buildings foisted and thrust and forced on the district and the site. Nobody locally had one word to say about the matter. Far away, very likely, it was decided to put up a school. A site was acquired, most probably by the violent means of requisition, plans drawn up by men to whom the whole affair was not a question of the salvation of the neighbourhood, much less its

autification, but a routine task in which it was necessary please, not the people and children of the place, but persons who in their hearts couldn't care less, as why should they? Their children are not going to the school.

So the horrible old school or the grand new one look like wounds, gashes, roaring excrescences, which in fifty years of daily wear and tear will not have even the remains of beauty to save them. They do not belong to the district, as the church and the pub and the great house and the village shop do. They are in the same monstrous tartish world as the cinema, the multiple store and the garage. If only somebody would ask the people of the district and the teachers the simple, honest and natural question, "We can build you any sort of a school. What would you like?"

You may have guessed that I did not like my school building. Quite right. I had a humorous contempt of it; I could afford to be as tolerant as that because I loved what was inside it, even the boys who at this moment were making life hell for Mr. Bryan.

When I reached his door, the noise, though remarkable, was not for him abnormally loud. I opened the door and saw that most magical of all school feats. The noise was cut off as if it had been cheese and the door a large knife. If I had wished to catch one culprit, just one, I should have failed, because every boy was at work, every head bent over the desk, every hand busy with a pencil. It was a magnificent effort of corporate alacrity, a splendid example of the use of speed as a means of self-preservation. I knew that I had no call to feel any emotion but shame about it, because Mr. Bryan knew full well what the phenomenon proved. It proved that the tone of the school was very bad. It showed that I ruled by oppressive means, so that no educationist of his technique and philosophy had a chance with boys so conditioned. So I walked into the room perfectly knowing his thoughts, and not much expecting any gratitude for my over-timely appearance.

He was a very good-looking young man, and would have

been a very attractive one but for the expression of resentment and contempt which was his permanent one all the time he was in school. I did not know what he looked like in his leisure, for I did not count myself one of his friends nor expect to be invited to share his free time.

I walked up to him, as he stood in front of his class.

"What is the lesson?" I asked.

"Art," he replied briefly.

"They'll be all right for a few minutes?" I said. If they were, it was the first few minutes of which that might be said since my last call.

He nodded his head. He certainly disliked me very much indeed.

"Let's sit down at your table," I said. "I want to speak to you about Jeremy Stake."

Without speaking, he pulled a second chair up to his table and waited for me to sit down. I did so, and he joined me, looking before him at the class, silently and industriously at work. I well understood his hatred of them and me in view of this pointed criticism of himself.

A few feet away from us sat Stake, busily occupied with his drawing. Just once he showed us that we were the content of his mind, by shooting a quick bright glance at us, and then returning to his concentration, his head slightly on one side, his pencil sliding over his paper.

What he saw was his headmaster sitting at the teacher's table, hands clasped, elbows on the edge of the table, and his form-master sitting bolt upright, frozen in waiting.

I nodded towards the boys.

"What are they drawing?" I asked.

Of course I could have got that information by the simple plan of taking a walk round and seeing for myself, but in this instance it would have seemed to Mr. Bryan like a reconnaissance.

"A scene from their homes," he replied.

"That sounds interesting," I said. "Send the drawings in to me afterwards. I'd like to see them."

To anybody else on the staff, that would have sounded like a very welcome interest on my part. To Mr. Bryan, it did not. I don't know what it did sound like, but whatever it was, the suggestion was anything but welcome. He took up a pencil and made a note on his pad. It was evidently a little thing he might forget. All that we were left with was a scrupulous resolve to fairness on my side, and a literal obedience to me on his. In fact, I wanted the wealth of unintended revelation that the drawings—if they actually were finished at all—would give. I am sure he read into everything I said and did a hint which perhaps he could not help evoking, and thought that I was sitting in my room like an agent of secret police adding to an imagined dossier more cause of offence against him.

"Well," I said, with a kindliness of manner which probably sounded to him like condescension and pomposity, "about Jeremy Stake."

He looked down at his hands for a moment, then at me, and finally at the class, but said nothing.

"Was he the only one who deserved punishment?" I asked.

I felt the movement in his mind of annoyance, past grievance, the spurt of desire to speak forcibly, the deep sense that all was very wrong. He rose to his feet in response to the power of all this in his mind. He opened his mouth to speak, glanced swiftly out of the window and then said:

"May I speak to you at twelve noon . . . not only about that boy . . . about many things I have on my mind."

There was an expression on his face withdrawn, hurt, angry. His experience and his way of taking it made him feel alone, and his intractable belief forced him to theories about the error of a dozen men and hundreds of boys which set him on fire as surely as if his vision were infallible and his right of prophecy inalienable.

"Very well," I replied, rising also. "Let's leave it till then. You'll come to my room?"

He nodded again, and I went out of the classroom. There was no immediate hubbub. It doesn't work like that. In its

own odd way, disorder gathers force as naturally as anything else that grows. For a while the boys, quite happy with their drawing, would carry on quietly. Then someone would want a rubber, maybe, and would ask for it in a loud tone which Mr. Bryan had never been able to forbid. The rubber would be thrown, not passed to him. It would, after its nature, bounce about, and several people would dive for it. Some others would laugh at the contest, and two heads would come together with a bang or a hand be trodden on, and that would be enough to start an argument like a quarrel in a French street.

Mr. Bryan would then take a hand, and shout an order or two, adding to the tumult. Boys whom I imagined to be charming and polite would reply in a rude tone, and little spots of comedy would develop out of the situation which neither the teacher nor the boys intended. There would be loud and unaffected laughter, and out of that licence would appear the continuous noise which invariably filled Mr. Bryan's room.

Ah well. Mr. Bryan was evidently in the mind to take the gloves off at noon. Sufficient unto the hour. I returned to my classroom to see how the essays were coming along. I was just in time to see Percy Transom slip some contraband under his desk.

"How's the essay, Transom?" I asked.

"Finished, sir," he replied, with a virtuous eye fixed on me.

"That's why you were having a quiet read, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

I held out a hand.

"Come on. Let's have a look at the reading matter."

Everybody stopped work. The confiscation of boys' papers, books, horror comics or whatever it may be, is one of the great classical comedies of the classroom. Transom came out with a sheepish look on his face and a rather tattered journal in his hand. The boys grinned expectantly. The funniest thing in the school life, it seemed, was the invasion of the private boy world by a slightly sardonic adult. I took the

aper in my hand and looked at it. Transom stood before me looking remarkably foolish, but smiling tentatively, and occasionally casting half a glance at his companions, as if the joke might—which was quite likely, according to subject matter—turn against me instead of him.

His luck was out. It was a winning draw for me. I read aloud.

“The Girls’ Weekly Casket.”

A roar of laughter from the desks, and a kind of settling down to unalloyed enjoyment. The title, Transom’s face, and these unhallowed words coming out of my mouth, little their originators had ever expected such a recital—oh, what a feast of the incongruous. I knew what was expected, because the canon was as rigid as it could be. I raised my eyebrows, and shook the paper gently.

“Are you, Transom, a regular subscriber?”

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

“You take this journal, then, every week?”

“It’s my sister’s, sir.”

“I see. Why do you read it, then?”

“It’s interesting, sir.”

This was, of course, Transom’s contribution to the banquet of wit. It was well received. Hardly waiting for the laughter to die down, I took my cue.

“I see. It is not a kind of preparatory research.”

“I don’t know what you mean, sir.”

Neither did most of the others, but they waited in silent confidence for the pay-off.

“I thought you might have been laying in a stock of small talk about your common interests—for the girls, I mean.”

“No, sir.”

I turned the pages, glancing at the contents.

“Man o’ the Jungle,” I read out, in a musing tone. “What does that mean, Transom?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“You haven’t read it?”

“I was just starting when you came in, sir.”

"Ace of Hearts . . . an enthralling story of Love and Adventure."

The boys again tasted the delights of incongruity. Everybody knew that schoolmasters have nothing to do with either Love or Adventure, and Transom looked as if his connection was fairly remote. One of the rules of the game was that I must tire of it fairly soon, and if possible return at one jump to full schoolmaster killjoy status. I turned to the very last sentence of the final story. It was excellent vintage stuff. I read it out to finish.

"This is very good, boys," I said. "Transom, with his cultivated taste, will agree with me when he comes to the passage. 'There was no sound in the silent garden but the song of a bird and the beating of her heart.'"

They really did enjoy that, without the tedium of knowing what had accelerated the heroine's diastole and systole.

"Quite a musical effect," I said. "A fife and drum band.

I handed the paper over to Transom, who took it with a hand which appeared not to belong to him.

"Transom."

"Yes, sir?"

"You must return this . . . story-book . . . to your sister and perhaps you can find something more suitable for yourself in the school library."

The class returned to normal, all smiles wiped away. I had come up with the usual stuffy finish. It didn't mean much except that the fun was now over, and except for little, rather rough leg-pulling after school, Transom was one of his troubles.

Public uproars about the effect of certain kinds of literature and films on children leave me rather cold, because I have found that boys and girls in this country at any rate have their own defences. It is exceedingly difficult to establish a connection between a child's actions and his reading, though maybe not his conscious play. *Treasure Island* has produced more pirates in suburban gardens than it ever did on the high seas.

Boys and girls are stern realists, and no effort of projection can reveal to adults what they are like, what they think and feel, and what their responses are. Our thinking about children remains extremely conjectural, and a minute of watching is worth an hour of theorising about them.

The roars of laughter about Transom and his *Casket* were the recognition of the gulf between reality and the false values of the paper, a recognition which never fails the children.

What I most heartily agree about is the suppression of the worst kind of periodical literature aimed at child circulation, not because I believe that such papers will corrupt children wholesale, for my experience is that the majority of them are defended by realism and a natural recoil from horror; I am for suppression because I hate the intention, the cynical resolve to make money even if the effect were to be the debauching of taste and morality in children.

If I am invited by parents to advise them on methods of getting their children out of the habit of reading unsuitable matter, I always urge, not disapproval and preaching, but the use of a skilful ridicule, the bringing together of the fantasies of the bad literature and the beloved common reality, ordinary and banal, if you like, of everyday life. Not stated, but implied and suggested, so that the child is not beaten about the head with disapproval, but brought to see fatuity, and even the ugliness of horror, for itself.

When Transom had taken his seat again, I said: "I'm going to another classroom. Any difficulties before I go?"

At once a dozen hands went up. The enquiries were of the usual kind.

"I'm stuck, sir."

Another hearty shove out into the waters of composition required.

"How do you spell gigantic, sir?"

"Use your dictionary, my lad."

That was a regular, for it was easier to try and get me to fall for it than to turn it up in the dictionary beside him.

Always worth a try, as I sometimes forgot my principles in my desire for speed.

"Can I say . . ." Then some phrase would be offered for criticism, and I would amend it or agree it.

I noticed that the boys hardly ever used clichés in their writing. Even when it was not very good, their work had a freshness, a sort of prose innocence about it which came of their true efforts to say what they had to say out of the stock of their experience and vocabulary. The educated man and the uneducated one are linked by this purity and originality of expression. Perhaps the cliché is the treasured possession of the man and even more of the woman who, knowing his or her defects, adopts clichés as if they were good clothes or fine jewellery or other outward sign.

Young Frank O'Hara sent a fresh breeze of realism across his essay page last week. He was writing about the County Hunt where he had been as an eye-witness, and had apparently left a gate open. The essay then read: "'Shut that bloody gate,' roared the M.F.H."

I called Frank to me when I reached this line, and tapped it with my red-ink pen, saying no word. Gentle, round-faced Frank looked at it and then at me.

"That's what he said, sir," he explained.

I knew the M.F.H., and could see his enormous form, his purple face and his blood-shot eye; and hear that great voice admonishing Frank. Still . . .

"If you're in his company again, O'Hara," I said, "and later have to report his remarks, will you put dashes where he gets too natural?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Frank, one of the truly innocent boys in the class, to whom this word was not a chance to pull my leg, but a question of precise and effective reporting.

Maybe I was milk-and-watery over this matter, but really there has to be some limit to what is written in schoolbooks open to general inspection. Or has there to be a limit? I no longer know. Every teacher is aware that the way to be an expert in education is to stay outside the classroom and

never on any account to undertake any teaching. Or to put it another way, if a man desires to become an educational expert, the first step is to leave teaching. Experts are quite clear about this affair of limits. There aren't any, in respect of discipline, work, behaviour, speech or any of the things which teachers used to be quite sure about.

One day I was walking through my school with an expert, when a class, not suspecting our presence, burst out of its rooms into the corridor with a roar like an express train coming out of a tunnel.

Quiet!" I roared, with thirty years of erroneous thinking behind me.

Sh!" said the expert with a smile. "That's their reaction to life."

"And that," I said savagely, "was mine."

On another occasion, a psychiatrist called to see a boy who was, in my view, a perfectly normal individual—or as normal as we come. I was astonished that any authority anywhere should suppose that this boy, Leslie Honiton, required any psychiatric treatment. But there it was. Experts outside the school had decided that it was necessary, and although I had been in daily contact with the boy for some years, I knew better than to suppose that my opinion would have any value outside a purely lay report on such of his sayings and doings as I had observed and which might help me to fill in the replies to a long questionnaire ranging from his name and address and date of birth, on which my testimony would be taken as fairly reliable, to debatable matters such as whether he was docile or aggressive, masterful or easily led.

Mistakenly encouraged however by the quite pleasant manner of my visitor, I sent for Leslie's books and drew attention to the extreme neatness, even beauty of his handwriting, and the general competence of his work. I did not expect this to send the psychiatrist happily away, for he had his salary to earn even as I had. I did not even imagine that it would have much weight. I just thought, in the simplicity of my heart, that a chap who could get a good result in English

and Arithmetic, and who put his whole weight into doing his job with as much care as he could, ought to have it brought to the notice of another chap who was going to measure his soul up for him.

I was mildly astonished at the reply.

"It would probably be far better for him," said my psychiatrist, "if his work and writing were far worse."

I looked to see if this could possibly be a little joke at the expense of the schoolmaster, or even a psychological test to make sure I was fit for my job. It was neither. It had every appearance of being an expert opinion. At that moment, more than at any other of numerous similar ones, I knew with a great certitude that I was not then, and never could expect to become, an expert.

"Well, I'm blowed," I said, but not aloud. "We try our best, against the longest odds ever invented for turning race-horses into carthorses, to make the boys careful, neat, accurate and well informed, and it turns out, on the word of a salaried expert, that it would be far better for them to be untidy and inaccurate. I give it up."

But of course, I didn't. Flying in the face of every sort of expert opinion, like the bull-headed empirical inexperienced tha I am, and doing untold harm, I press on demanding from the boys good manners, respect, attention, good order, industry, compliance, obedience, accuracy, neatness, penmanship and every kind of false value for which the old-fashioned methods of my upbringing and training oblige me to try.

To teachers, the word "expert" is very alarming. It suggests to begin with that there are vast realms of thought and knowledge about education to which the teacher has neither title nor access. Then there is that charming little implication that the teacher is a low form of life in the industry of making a nation, enjoying parallel rank with the worker on the production belt who tightens the nuts with a large spanner, while people far away do the real thinking, and get the only experience worth having about the processes involved. But above all, alarming beyond measure, is the stark fact

teaching experience that the one opinion about education which will most certainly not be listened to is the teacher's.

Well, so what? That is all vanity and conceit anyway, and doesn't amount to a handful of feathers. Education is a task to be done, not talked about, perhaps.

True enough. But what really matters about the era of the expert is that he has succeeded beyond his wildest hopes in sowing doubt and confusion. You may think that the doubts sown so assiduously by the enemies of the Church, and the resulting decline in religious life are no great matter. You may even call it liberation. I should not agree with you, but I am not concerned to debate that, only to draw your attention to the parallel in school life.

There was a time, not so long ago, when everybody involved in educational activity, believed in the importance and usefulness of a few cardinal points in the conduct and objectives of a school. We all remember what they were, and I have already stated them.

The experts got busy on them, one and all, and you are a poor expert if you do not question the rightness of everything within sight, especially those things that stick out like virtues. New names soon appeared for old qualities. Smart movements by large bodies of boys acquired the sinister name of militarism, although they may only have been the best and speediest way of getting hundreds of pupils out of the yard and into the classrooms. School uniform is regarded by some experts as a mild form of fascism, not as a very attractive way of emphasising the fact that the children are all members of one body. Effective control in the classroom got around to being called oppressive discipline.

Petty theft, instead of being regarded as it used to be, namely, a quick if unscrupulous method of getting hold of something you wanted, turned out to be the evidence of a soul disturbed by something the teacher never could have thought of (but only an expert), such as jealousy of one's father, or a desire to sleep alone and not with one's brother. Any

motive which it was within the power of a teacher to discern was obviously the wrong one. Years ago, smiling little Fred Brothers was found to be taking money from home, buying chocolate, and giving it to his friends at school, especially the large boys. I thought it fairly obvious that being a small boy who could not win popularity by athletic and other upright means, he was trying to buy it with lavish gifts of chocolate.

That was in the days before psychiatrists took salaries to do the schoolmaster's job for him, not out of love, but out of the conviction of his incompetence. But if there had been one of the fraternity on hand, a pound to a penny he would have snorted my poor theories out of court till he had taken devious time and thought to arrive at them himself, and deliver them, with greater acceptance, as the views of an expert.

Now if you tap away industriously enough at any structure, it will begin to crumble at last, and teachers, being only human, not only tend to accept as experts those who say they are, but to find that there is something in what the experts say. There always is something in what anyone says, and so there has gone out of the schools that unity of conviction about fundamental values, and instead there are ten thousand funny little personal variations of what some confounded expert has somewhere written or said.

The essence of teaching as a profession is that complete concession has to be made to the thought and ideas of the individual teacher when he is in his classroom. He can only teach faithfully by such beliefs as he has, and if they are a rather odd version of what a lot of experts have conveyed to him, even if the experts themselves would promptly repudiate that version, there isn't very much anyone can do about it.

So, if the classroom is full of chattering children, if the pace of the work seems slow, if they do not know all they ought, on the whole, to know, and are in fact enjoying themselves more than anybody ought to when he's on a serious job of work, you know you are on holy ground where the feet of the experts

have trodden, and the humble disciple is whacking the doctrine out to the best of his comprehension.

There are intransigent Heads about who wave a plump hand and cry to the disciple, "Don't give me that stuff. I'm a plain man and I only want to do my duty by the children and their parents. Get on with the job my way while you're here."

This kind of thing labels such a man at once as not only inexperienced, but stubbornly deaf to expert aid. He cannot look for the respect of his staff, if they are animated by the pleasing energy of doubt of the old standards, and uncertain interpretation of the new.

With my classroom clock at twenty to twelve, I left my essay-writing boys to pay just one more visit to another room before the school broke for midday. That visit was to Mr. French, whose methods would have outraged many experts, and utterly confounded them by its wholly irregular success.

When I got to his door, I noticed that it stood open. He had gone out for a few minutes, but he might just as well have been there, because his class—sixty boys like mine—were silently and busily at work.

The boys stood up in greeting as I entered, and I believe that there are some experts who regard that practice as a very bad thing indeed in its effect on all parties. It is held to instil into the boys notions of servility and to encourage adults in false ideas of their importance. On the other side, one of the most striking aspects of expert opinion is that it begins by supposing that nobody has any common sense.

But I will say that, charming though this little gesture of rising may be, there are very strong arguments against it, and if you want to know what they are, ask the man who is teaching a class when somebody comes into the room. Besides that, the recipient of the courtesy, if he has a decent modesty and a glimmer of humour, always wants to get everybody seated again as quickly as he can, in the spirit of those agreeable officers who always seem a little put about by a salute, replying to it slightly shame-facedly, and muttering such remarks as

"That's all right," or "Carry on," or even "Thanks very much, old boy."

Mr. French's boys were the eleven-year-olds, and I put him at that point in the school because it was a crucial one, the bridge between the very young and the oldest boys. If anybody crossed Mr. French's bridge without mastering his arithmetic, his spelling and reading, and the humbler arts of composition, he deserved to pass the rest of his school life in cushioned ease. These were by no means the only things boys learned in that class, not the least of the remainder being to recognise a devoted teacher when they saw one.

The hour from eleven to twelve noon was spent on English almost all over the school, so these boys were working in their English books. I walked round the class to look at what they were doing. I knew one thing for certain before I began, and that was that every book would be beautifully neat and careful. In Mr. French's class, there was no such thing as idleness and careless work.

Another thing which would have struck the most casual observer was that his boys took their school life and work, and their loyalties very seriously. Let me hasten to say that one of the chief agencies in the class was humour. Out of his classroom came many a roar of delighted laughter at his antics.

What manner of man was this paragon? How did he contrive to get results that must have stayed with his pupils for a lifetime?

He was closing on forty, a man too striking to be called plain, but certainly not to be called good-looking. He was of medium height, careful in dress, with thin fair hair, and pale blue eyes. He had a pleasant baritone voice . . . and never did so mediocre a catalogue of physical qualities, so modest a bodily equipment, mask a more remarkable personality.

There was something electric about him, a driving enthusiasm, a power that no one could fail to respond to. Intellectually he was clear and forceful rather than subtle.

ut he was both convinced and competent in the highest degree in all he did.

He was quick in thought and movement, lively and gay of spirit, and wholly and entirely happy in his work.

He was of course an assistant teacher on what many people would think a low salary, but he conveyed the impression of being in easy circumstances. I used him on that bridge and kept him there without expectation of a move elsewhere in the school, because he placed himself and his power at the service of the boys without impeding or confusing decisions about the disposal of his services by personal wishes.

Each year I spoke to him about arrangements for the coming year.

"Put me where you like," he would say. "I don't mind where I go. I'll do my best anywhere."

He was strict, even severe in his control of his class and his demands upon the boys, but there was some glow within him that evoked an immediate response of liking in other people towards him; and what was quite unmistakable by the dullest boy was his devotion to his duty and his pupils. His care of them was pastoral, and extended to every detail of their comfort and well-being. If a boy from a poor home came to school ill-clad, Mr. French had his own ways of putting that right. If he had a boy—as I recall he more than once did—who had some speech impediment, Mr. French would work away with him after hours till there was improvement. He thought that any matter affecting his boys was his business, and he gave them all that was in him.

In return, he demanded compliance with his standards, hard work, serious attention and all the things which made his class notable in the school.

I suppose it was but right that society, seeing it had such a good assistant in him, should have left him to serve in that capacity.

Writing about good people makes dull reading, because nothing in words can convey the flavour of personality or the quality of a human being; but if ever a man merited honours

without the slightest prospect of getting them it was Mr. French, but that he didn't mind, because it was obvious to anyone that his job gave him the kind of enjoyment, the sense of power and the savour of significance usually supposed to be the rewards of statesmen, artists and creators of all kinds.

He looked at me with a smile.

"Any special business?" he asked.

"No. I had a look round the class before you came in."

"Well, it's just on twelve. Shall I dismiss the class?"

"Yes, do," I said, remembering that I had an appointment with Mr. Bryan at noon.

Mr. French gave his class a quiet order, the books were put away and the boys stood up. He sang a note to give the pitch in his pleasant voice and the class sang the Grace before Meat.

"Be present at our table, Lord,
Be here and everywhere adored;
These mercies bless and grant that we
May feast in Paradise with thee."

How dreary all this is in the telling; how sweet in the fact. I read a book recently which was an account of life in a Secondary Modern School, where the children were absolute horrors, monsters of rudeness and impropriety, and the teachers weary and indifferent cynics. How wonderful it was to read about the wild and uncontrolled capers in the classrooms, the impertinences, the gross insolence, the Squeersy misbehaviour and retribution. It was such excellent reading matter, sensational and dramatic; and such monstrous ~~bel~~. Well, that's how it is. We're only human, and like bad news better than good, accounts of vice better than statements of virtue, alarm better than solace, and conflict better than peace.

Except, of course, in our own experience.



AFTER Grace, I left Mr. French and went to my room. Mr. Bryan had not yet arrived, so I sat down at my desk to wait for him. In a few seconds, I heard his knock and called to him to come in.

He entered, and I felt that inward frown as I looked at him. He stepped into the room with an expression which was probably one of some nervousness, but which looked like irascibility.

I pointed to a chair.

"Do sit down."

I offered my cigarettes.

"Will you smoke?"

He sat down, shaking his head to the offer of a cigarette. I wiped away the inner frown, and smiled at him.

"Well," I said. "You had several matters on your mind to discuss with me."

He was looking down at the floor, and now he threw up his head to look straight at me.

"I know why you didn't punish Stake," he said.

"Do you?"

"Yes. Your remark to me in the classroom showed clearly enough what your reason was."

"I think I asked you a question."

"Well . . . yes . . . still, question or remark, the implication was the same."

"I asked you if he was the only boy who deserved punishment."

"Which meant that you thought I couldn't control the class."

"Well, all right. Can you control it?"

"I know that you think I can't."

"Well, let's get out of the realm of opinion and look at the facts."

"All of them?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then," he said, "I consider that my difficulties are due to the way the boys have been conditioned."

"In this school?"

"Yes . . . or any other where the same ideas prevail."

"What ideas?"

He waved his hand. The answer looked, presumably, too large an order.

"Well . . . I can only give instances. . . ."

"Yes . . . they'll do."

"For instance, it's quite clear that here it is supposed to be the mark of a good teacher that there shall be no noise in his classroom."

"No. Not at all. The objection is to unlawful noise."

"That's mincing words. Who's to say what is lawful and what's unlawful?"

"You are, in the first place, anyway. If you can't, I have to. Or do you not agree with that?"

"I recognise that you are in charge, and that your prejudices will have weight over every other factor."

"Such as, for example, your prejudices?"

He did not reply to that but followed his thought before speaking again.

"Another thing . . ."

"Yes?"

"The standard of a good education here is a high proficiency in mechanical work . . . getting sums right, spelling correctly . . . all that kind of thing."

"Do you regard that as bad?"

"Not in itself, no. But I think you can pay too high a price for it." Suddenly he released all his pent-up anger and frustration, and really let fly. "Oh, what's the use of talking round it like this?" he cried. "I can't do anything with my class because you have the school in prison—they're intellectually in prison—and they break loose on me because I . . . I can't and won't turn the key on them. I see it so clearly. The other chaps on the staff behave like warders, and the boys are used to that, so that when they find me trying to release them, they're not grateful . . . because they don't understand. . . ."

His voice had been rising, and on the last word, to my embarrassment, he burst into tears, hating himself for doing it, and hanging on to the hardness of his contempt, and the fixity of his belief about himself. I sat quite still and said nothing till he got control of himself.

"I'm sorry," he said, and then, "not for what I've been saying. For making an exhibition of myself. I meant what I said."

Three things struggled in my mind together. The first was compassion for him, who felt so keenly about his failure. The second was very considerable annoyance at being put at a strong disadvantage by his tears; and the third was a great indignation at his stark presumption in thinking as he did about his colleagues and his boys.

It is always salutary and never unamusing to see an image of oneself in somebody else's mind that is contrary in every way to one's own. As I looked at Mr. Bryan, I perceived that to him I was a man totally unfit for my duties, and carrying on my school in a way most damaging to the boys entrusted to my care. So colossal was the gulf of misunderstanding between us that if in fact I had any good qualities of heart and mind, I knew that he was and would remain unable to see or use them. In his contempt he saw me as an unimaginative cold kind of man briskly using his little authority to bolster up his conceit of himself. Mr. Bryan felt himself to be far above me

and his other colleagues in subtlety and perception, a wholly different and much more desirable type of person to be doing the work of a teacher, which he sincerely wanted to do and equally sincerely believed that I and they were preventing him from doing. He knew himself to be an Athenian, and us to be gross and clumsy provincials. His every failure he traced directly to us, and in particular to me. I could see myself as the clayey pigmy I was in his vision of me. Of all the things that bound me to my family and friends, that enabled me—as I insisted on believing—to help and cheer the boys, he saw none. If I spoke to my pupils with force and humour, the sound was as hateful to him, and as useless as the words of a poseur. If I had a single grace of personality, it would appear to him as a fraudulent trick. We were not even united as true enemies may be, by a cordial human and comprehended hatred. There was no bridge, no echo of a chord of understanding between us.

But then, was it not just as bad for him with me? How did I see this disgruntled and good-looking young man? Why, as an incompetent and conceited young ass who, far from trying to discern the policy of the school to which he had been appointed, far from trying humbly to learn something of his new profession from the men who had practised it long and successfully, first of all fell down on the job—as any man may do—and then stubbornly looked around for others to blame, as if he were still a baby and we were the naughty table on which he cracked his head—and his heart.

I knew, too, that with all his fine talk about teachers who were warders and boys who were in a prison of my making, if he had had stuff in him any better than a petulant nursery rebel, he would have created his own atmosphere in his room, for the boys have place in their hearts for all kinds of men, all sorts of methods. If he had had the grace, even for one moment of self-criticism, to break through the ice of his conceit, all might have been well. But no. The whole world must be wrong before he would admit the seismic proposition that he might have something to learn.

As I sat there, I knew the situation was hopeless. I did not propose to waste any words in correction or repudiation. And his next words proved that at least we were at one in recognising the position as hopeless.

"I've decided," he said, "to give you my resignation."

"Very well," I said. "I think you're wise. You may be happier somewhere else. And more successful."

I rose to my feet to end the fruitless interview; fruitless unless his departure from the scene of his unhappiness and failure was a kind of tasteless and drily unsatisfying fruit. He too rose and in an atmosphere of that intractable antagonism, in which a word is harder to say than a golden coin to give, he went out of the room.

When he had gone, I went over to my window and looked out across the sunlit court towards the road, and the large house opposite, with its fine garden and trees. I thought again about Mr. Bryan and the interview just over. I recalled that at the interview with the Governors and myself when he was appointed, we had good hopes of him. There was not on his face at that meeting the look of scorn and unhappiness which was there now. His qualifications were good, his manner and appearance attractive. The fact that he had no previous teaching experience meant very little, for it is as true of us all at some time as that we have a nose on our face. Had he succeeded in duping us very effectively, by hiding his real self from us? No, I didn't think so. He was of course the same man then as now, minus the experience of the past months.

I smiled to myself as I turned over the thought that perhaps he was right in his view of us. Great pioneers always get a thin time, and are always misunderstood, whether in medicine, the church or education. Almost without exception they are tedious bores, who upset everything and everybody, and are regarded by the regular professional as asses or worse.

If I had felt so disposed, I could have turned loose on Mr. Bryan the techniques available to us in education to give either pioneers or incompetents a bad time. I knew what

would have happened if I had done so. I could have sent for an official observer to visit him. He, or—more dreadfully—she would have sat at his desk while he taught, would have looked at his records and the children's books. The terrible tale would have become clear. His assertions would have been heard coldly.

"Yes, Mr. Bryan. But the boys aren't *learning* anything. That is one of the functions of a school, isn't it?" would have been said.

It's all too easy, and I had hoped, as I always do in such cases, that his good sense, his gathering experience, normal affection for the boys, ability to notice and profit from mistakes would help him to do for himself what in fact nobody else could do for him.

Still, maybe he was right, and that what we all think is the correct way to run a school is indeed the very wrong way. His difficulty was twofold. First, he was, like many another pioneer, up against the terrible weight of traditional beliefs; and second, he happened to be the sort of pioneer who couldn't, whatever the reason, make his own methods work. Like a surgical pioneer who disbelieved in conventional methods of surgery but happened by his own to kill all his patients, he not unnaturally failed to impress the world. I still thought, in view of his lethal failure, that he ought not to have been cross with us for being only human beings after all.

It was twenty past twelve and I left my room to go and see what the boys who took the school midday meal were having. They ate in a large room at the far end of the school, but there were certain gourmets who would not have the school fare and who brought along delicacies from home. These boys were accommodated in a classroom, with a prefect in charge to see that the place was swept and tidied up afterwards.

I glanced through the inner window of the sandwich and thermos room. All seemed to be going peacefully, and the thought struck me that the room looked as if it were full of passengers on a long train journey. Some sat at ease eating from paper bags and reading a book or magazine. Others

were earnestly in conversation, and here and there a boy sat slouching away in a reverie which I was—as always—greatly tempted to go and disturb in order to find out what it was about. Experience had taught me, however, that if I were to approach the thinker and say, “A penny for ‘em,” he would give a slight start and say, “I beg your pardon, sir?” Then I would say, “What are you thinking about?” To which he would almost certainly answer, “Nothing, sir.”

It seems almost impossible to enjoy a delicious sandwich or piece of sponge cake and think about anything but how nice it is, not only to be eating, but to eat that particular thing; which I suppose is not only a good state of mind, pure and primitive, but precisely like that of sheep and cows when they too are having a placid feed. There are in school, of course, those who nervously and swiftly devour their provender as if it were a duty, dry and boring, in order to rush out and get on with the proper business of life, cricket or football according to season.

The lunchers proper were having curried mutton. It happens that I cannot stand curry, because when I was a soldier in the First World War, I had a real surfeit of curried rabbit. I’m told it’s a pity this is so, because I’m missing a great delicacy, and of course, when I saw the boys were having a curry, I mistakenly sympathised with them.

But then I often do mistakenly sympathise with the eaters of school meals, for like many things involving large numbers of people, they are something of a compromise. On the one hand, the meals are carefully thought out for food values, and the service is pure in that no one makes any profit on it; on the contrary, the public purse makes good the inevitable loss.

I understand perfectly that the provision of what is called a good meal—not without justice—for a lot of hearty young appetites is a fine thing for the nation.

On the other hand, many elements of enjoyment are necessarily missing; the element of option, for example. As to the meals service offering any chance of education in the matter of eating as a fine pleasure, it does not exist, any more

than it does at Oxford or Cambridge. In school, as in the ancient colleges, we have to stop at the point of satisfying appetite.

I have never done it, but I would like to take my school to a large hall in a famous restaurant, having laid on an excellent menu with plenty of choice and novelty. The fresh, the exquisitely seasoned, the enchanting flavour, the delicate pleasure of the simplest things, bread in perfect condition, time to enjoy. And then I would like to hear what the boys had to say about the experience. It would not be entirely favourable comment, but it would have the vigour of the untired senses, and the natural palate.

With some boys, on the other hand, it might begin a revolution in taste which would lead ultimately to a discrimination in marriage, much pleasure at their own tables, and a marked decrease in the sales of patent remedies for various stomach troubles. A study of those automatic machines in hotels where they offer in columns, for sixpence in the slot, aperients, antacids, headache cures, and cold cures is very interesting. The level of the columns, reflecting the public demand, is a graph of our national troubles, of which headaches and indigestion appear to be the worst.

School meals, while they undoubtedly do a great deal for the nutrition of the young, are not likely so to change them when they are older as to alter the relative levels of the pills in the automatic machines.

The master in charge of the dining-room when I went in and smelt the curry was Mr. Graham, the sports master. He was not actually a teacher by profession, but a soldier, now retired after long service.

When I approached him at his seat at the head of a long table he rose to his feet, and you could have told that what he really wanted to do, and what he had to choke back his instincts not to do, was to shout :

“ Room, shun ! Orderly Officer.”

The simplest and most inexperienced visitor to the school could not have mistaken him for a schoolmaster born and

bred. On the contrary, he looked a soldier born and bred ; a soldier, moreover, who had passed through that institution which marks men as men for life, the Army School of Physical Training.

His appearance, though he was of course in civilian clothes, was not to be mistaken. He could wear a Savile Row suit as if it had been a uniform, and a felt hat like a Guardsman's cap. His head, smartly cropped, and his face, velvety smooth, were carried proudly and easily on his strong neck. He had fine shoulders, and there was not a muscle about him which was not doing its work, so that his carriage was noble and his movements were swift and easy, as if they gave him pleasure to carry out.

"Sir," he said, standing to attention as I reached him.

"Please sit down, Mr. Graham," I said, "and have your meal."

"Yes, sir," he said, but he didn't do it. If I was there, his body and expression seemed to say, the occasion was official, and it would ill become him to operate so personally as to go on eating.

I looked at him with humour and affection ; humour because of the incorrigible way in which he brought his long training as a soldier into his present job ; affection because he was duty incarnate, and never on any temptation or pretext put his own interests before those of the school or the job in hand.

"Is the meal all right ?" I asked, which he interpreted at once as "Any complaints ?"

"Quite satisfactory, sir," he replied. "It's cabbage for greens today, so I'm afraid there'll be a lot of plate waste. The boys don't like cabbage. There's nothing the matter with it . . ." The shadow of a smile came into his grey eyes. ". . . as cabbage, I mean, sir."

I smiled broadly. Cabbage in England is of course a short name for green murder. Seeing my smile and knowing my thought and the long, long record of sinister and evil-smelling cabbagery, he allowed himself a chuckle. Cabbage at Aldershot, cabbage at Sandhurst, where he used to be an instructor,

cabbage at Delhi, cabbage in school. Still, cabbage was provided and must be tackled, or its failure to take its objective, the human stomach, properly accounted for.

"Is there anything else, sir?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Graham."

"Well then, I'll sit down and finish my meal, if you don't mind," he said. "I've got to finish at the same time as the boys."

I left him, thinking about him for a few minutes as I always did after an encounter with him, however trivial. Trivial to me, I mean, for no encounter with me, or with any of his duties was trivial to him.

He was a museum of values and virtues which are either obsolete, or rapidly becoming so. His parents were very poor people, and he had joined the Army as a boy not least because it offered security and care better than he had known. His nature was responsive and sensitive, and although the Army had hardened him in many ways, it never hardened his eyes, which were large and eloquent of the movements of his spirit.

On to that material, the Army stamped its own marks and standards. Obedience, self-sacrifice at the call of duty, unquestioning respect of official superiors whatever he might think of them as men, recognition of and trust in gentlemen, absolute willingness without reserve, iron self-control and an immovable protocol about his work and those concerned with it, the entire conquest of fear, and a love of his country as if she were a person—all these had become as much a part of him as his hands and feet. I always thought that if I were in an awkward spot where it was fight your way out or die, Graham was the man above all others I should have chosen as my companion. In friendship, he was as gentle as a woman; in adversity, he was harder than circumstance.

Politically he was a Tory of about 1890 vintage, but even those of his acquaintance who were very Left in outlook came to see that in his consistency and devotion, there was something like beauty.

In his work in school, he taught many things beyond the

games which were his special job. To my mind, one of the noblest of the lessons learnt from him was to finish every task to the last detail, even if it got around to seven o'clock, and picking up bits of paper on the sports ground. Nothing but perfection satisfied him.

The variety of humanity displayed by a staff at a school is at once a challenge and an education to the boys. They have their own ways of sizing up men, and their estimates are remarkably accurate. They must find a *modus vivendi* with their teachers, with their hands tied behind them, so to speak. That is why—as amongst other difficulties they cannot as a rule answer back—they particularly loathe sarcasm and those men who employ it in the classroom. But they speedily find out whether a master is a man or not. If he is, most sins will be forgiven him; and in due time, the boys came to see Graham as a real man, trying to do his job to the finest of his ability.

For me, his constant interest was the persistence of the kind, tolerant and gentle original behind the soldier made by the Army of years ago. Words touching on the things that were dearest to him would move him greatly, and the eyes in that strong face like the incarnation of a parade ground would moisten as he heard. Yes, of course his favourite poet was Kipling, his favourite poem "IF," his favourite colours red, white and blue, his favourite land England . . . a proper Jingo boy, you may be saying.

That is because I have failed to convey to you what he really was. When Squire Brown was taking his son Tom to Rugby School, he hoped the boy would 'turn out a brave helpful truth-telling Englishman . . .'

He might have been thinking of just such a man as Ernest Graham.

I left the school on my way home to lunch. It will instantly be observed that it was not my regular practice to lunch at school, and indeed, I never did unless I was entertaining an official guest, in which case we took exactly what was provided for the boys, even if it turned out to be one of my most hated

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dishes, and I went through the motions of stabbing it with a fork and being guilty of that most awful of dietary crimes, officially called "plate waste."

I stepped out of the school gate into the sunny road, and began the process, which was habitual, of collecting oddments of observation and experience which ought to be passed on to the boys. The job of a teacher is to introduce, and where he can, to interpret life to his pupils. You quite rightly suppose that life can hardly be got within the covers of a syllabus, and as it continues handing on impressions of beauty and strangeness with unfailing opulence, schoolmasters are put to no great trouble in accepting such gifts.

Perhaps I should see some beautiful effect of light, some mosaic of leaves, some curious trick of bird behaviour, an odd character, a delight already celebrated in prose or verse. I should try to be unlike the teacher in "The Schoolmaster abroad with his Son." I should aim not to kill life with pedantry, but as my business was to produce whole men, nothing that happened to awake wonder and pleasure in me was likely to be wasted. Besides, the worst thing that can happen to a schoolmaster is that he should lose his own sense of wonder, and should cease to be excited about living. If that should happen to him, all he has is his dreary stock-in-trade, which boys only want if he can set it on fire. They won't have it damp or dead, or when it has nothing to appeal to the excitement and fire which live in their hearts and minds.

We go on with our job till we are sixty at least; and it may be till we are sixty-five. But there is in every teacher's life a day when he ought to retire, and he probably knows it. That day may be his sixty-fifth birthday, or it might occur when he is in his thirties. It is the day on which the fire goes out.

Other men are luckier. No one who goes into a shop to buy a gallon of paraffin ought to expect—so to speak—fire with it; and no one who has his burst bathroom pipe mended after a frost can complain so long as no more water gushes out. The teacher must teach and do something more.

This business of turning common experience to account

in class occasionally had its obviously comic side. None was more voracious about it than Mr. French, who thought that life was one large school, and experience one protracted lesson.

One day, as I went to school after lunch, a bit of grit blew into my eye. When I reached the school, Mr. French, with expert air and spotless handkerchief, did the necessary first-aid, and I enjoyed the relief from pain with an intake of breath and the swallowing of surplus saliva.

He gazed on the tiny black spot on his handkerchief, and then at the microscope in his cupboard.

"I wonder what it really looks like," he said.

In a few seconds we both knew. I looked down through the eye-pieces and saw an object with black craggy edges like a huge piece of coal. Nothing would do but that his class should stare at this disrespectful foreign body which had dared to blow into the headmaster's eye, and a procession of solemn youths all had a look at it. What we all learned from it, I don't know; but it was sensational, and whatever it was in Mr. French's mind that wouldn't let him throw this chance away was satisfied. Almost with a sigh he put the microscope away and began his lesson on matters far remote from bits of grit blown on the wind from locomotives smoking away at the station—for such was his theory, as picturesque as might be evolved to cover so small a matter of fact.

On my way home I also saw some of my regular friends, and forestalled the Shakespeare-quoting Sam Bedhampton by making ready in my mind to call out "And health on both," before he could say "May good digestion wait on appetite." I didn't see him, of course, because he was away from home, and so my bit of preparation would have to bear fruit of repartee another day. No doubt he would cap what I said, and it would be amusing to see how he did it.

Spontaneous repartee is a fine thing, none finer, if only the right phrase will pop up at the right moment, as it sometimes does if all the circumstances, the appearances and the mood point long fingers like signposts towards the perfectly apt,

which is always what everybody else would have said if only they had thought of it in time.

But timeliness is a good substitute for spontaneity. Good retorts, fragments of wit, spots of humour, decapitated runs of dialogue pass through the mind like pieces of a derelict jig-saw puzzle, and make good company in a moment not otherwise occupied by exclusive thinking.

Sometimes, I notice, they glide in like a lantern slide, upside down, of some unknown place. Another time, I hear them in the voice of a well-known friend. Maybe I even speak a phrase aloud—when I am strictly alone or with a trusted confidant, for we all know what talking to oneself is supposed to mean ; and then I have heard the flavour of the wit almost before I have thought of it. Certain gems of other people's wit, seen when I am reading, stick in my mind like verbal burrs, out of all the mass of what is on the page, as if that bit were in large red print in the manner of Mr. John Ruskin or a rubricated prayer book. I can see how good all these gifts of inspiration and ingurgitation are without at that moment knowing what to do with them, except hold them in the palm of the hand like a flashing find, and wonder why they should come into my possession just when I have no need for them.

I am talking about those small delights which occupy my mind when it is off duty and can afford to play, generally at times when the body is charged with duties of its own which don't particularly engage thought as a partner. I think of a necessary walk, such as this one home to lunch, as if time and space were an ocean or maybe a sea-channel, with the ship-like body driven along to port by the engines of the muscles, while my thoughts, not with the ship, play about like porpoises in the sunshine. Equally, in bed, when the body is excused from further active labour, the mind runs about all over the bedroom and the world, doing what it likes, free from pre-occupation with its partner. I would like to know what great scenes in literature, what beginnings of scientific discovery have found their origins in the bathroom or the water-closet. These humble places ought to be honoured and suitably

furnished for their great contributions to human thought. We know of one classical example of this, but I have never seen a plaque commemorating a great moment in the history of thought on the walls of the smallest room. 'This cannot be because plaques are not due. It must be an instance of snobbery, all the more heinous because mistaken decency is allowed to mask true gratitude.

You might say that all these pleasures and all these storeable gifts of wit and phrase come along the lines which join each one of us to all the rest of us, or to the infinite, or the great darkness or some such hold-all of a name. What is clear to me is that if you try to live on the poor endowment of your conscious self, the awareness which is the perishable workaday person who bears your name, you get a pretty dull life and give one to other people too, especially if other people are your business.

One ought to be a good clutcher of all these bright moments of perception, whether the humble ones of wit saved up for tomorrow's battle, or the much richer ones of a continued fantasy of invention or discovery. You can't hope to seize a fine harvest in some stark moment of verbal famine and exposure; so you must get your harvest when you can and put it in your barn, as long as it's neither stale nor mouldy when you come to the moment of delivery.

Knowing what people are likely to say in given circumstances is not only entertaining but exceedingly valuable, if only because it sets free the flow of sympathy unhindered by the efforts of the intelligence to get to know on the spot what they really mean by what they say, and why they say it.

Before you dispute or discuss with any person, you ought to have a sliding scale of some kind which you could consult to enable you to compensate for the differences in your respective use of words. Many a good row has flourished not so much on a true and fundamental difference of opinion as on the different understanding by the combatants of a crucial word in their dispute.

There is no such scale, and if there were, it would be a poor

row in which the lucky possessor of this piece of verbal apparatus called for a halt in the discourse while he made the necessary compensation on his scale when his opponent used so ambiguous a word, for instance, as liar. But to the man of honour, the word is a summons to show a visitor to the door. To the man of the world, it may be no more than occasion to smile. To the reasonable fellow who likes things fair and square, it calls for no more than a courteous request for moderation of language ; and to the man who is quick on the draw, it shouts for a punch on the other man's nose.

In some of the idle times I have been describing, I found myself the invisible auditor to a conversation, dramatic and significant, between people I knew quite well, and who had never been in real life in the circumstances in which I now saw them.

I heard their voices and their words ; I heard them speaking with my mind as if I had nothing more to do with it than to listen. Like a trance in its detachment, there was still the deep satisfaction of *authority* and truth about the experience. And it seemed as if I knew them better than before on account of this, the only lawful form of eavesdropping.

As I reached the turning to my home yesterday at lunch-time, I had a bit of luck, and an insurance company had a bit of ill-luck. I saw a large lorry at a standstill, and found, when I reached it, that its load—sacks of grain—had caught fire at the back. The driver and his mate were doing what they could to save at least the lorry, if not most of the load, and had sent someone for the help of the Fire Brigade. I don't know how the fire started, but it was a beautiful slow *culinary* fire.

In the sunshine I could hardly see the small flames, and so it appeared to me as if a gentle invisible hand was slowly tearing the great sacks open and revealing the rich golden stuff inside, like a quiet painless wound. The agency inferred rather than seen, the result looked like a slow-moving magic, designed to show something rich and moving and lovely.

The great gaps in the sacking blackened at the edges, turning the holes into dark-lipped mouths widening into vast

smiles. The warm yellow of the grain deepened into a hot gold as the heat bit into it, and it softly cascaded down to the road like some beautiful imagined substance between cake and gold dust.

I thought it was poetry in action, but I'm willing to bet that this idea had not occurred to the two men toiling away at the rest of this lyrical potential. Like the enemies of beauty, they tore away at the sacks, and too soon for me, had thrown on to the road those which were affected by this slowly consuming disease of beautiful symptoms. Sweating, they stared with relief at the salvaged load still aboard, and to my regret and astonishment—for it seemed a queer and even anti-social climax—they got into the cab and drove slowly away, leaving a drab mess to be cleared up somehow by somebody later on.

On this beautiful day, my wife had set lunch in the garden. The sky was now clear of clouds and was at its deepest blue. A little wind stirred in the trees, and the lawn was cool under my feet. Occasionally a corner of the white cloth blew up, on which my wife leaned forward and put it right, while I looked at it with an agreeable humour and felt it like a friend's amiable interruption.

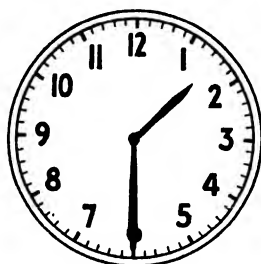
We had ham and salad, strawberries and cream, and coffee, and the meal was like the sum of all picnics, set before and behind by hours of genial summer; yet it was also, in the greenness of the garden and the stillness of the middle day, like a banquet held in celebration of the happiness of living.

Afterwards, I sat for a short time in a deck-chair reading Mrs. Carswell's *Life of Robert Burns*. I had just turned inquisitively to that most rewarding appendix when I heard my wife's voice from the door of the greenhouse, telling me that the time was ten minutes past one.

School began again at half-past one, so I took my book indoors, marked my place in it, washed and set off for school. I had the first period free, because Mr. Santaya would be taking my class and two others for music all together, so I

had set the time aside to deal with the letters of the morning and mark my English books.

Every day, I make a programme, and every day it gets knocked about by circumstances out of my control. Such was the case yesterday afternoon.



WHEN I got into my room, there were two people waiting to see me. The smaller of the two was one of my youngest pupils, little Jim Hassock, a boy with a touch of coloured blood, placed as a ward with the other of my callers, tall rugged old Mr. Farrant, who looked like a Pilgrim Father, grave, strong and a little stooping from years of hard work. Just as direct too.

"My wife's purse has vanished," he said, "with over two pounds in it. I'm not making any accusations, but he"—pointing to his ward—"was in the room when it went."

On Jim's face was that expression of mingled sullenness and apprehension which perfectly expresses the mood and state of a boy caught in the toils of somebody else's power. "What's he going to do to me?" and "I don't care anyway" are the dirgelike choruses of his mind.

"You want me to look into the matter?" I asked.

Mr. Farrant nodded his head solemnly. Jim darted an anxious glance at him. The little story, from its start during the lunch-break to the present, and of which he was the

unwilling central figure, must have had a loathly vividness from its longest sentence to its most trifling gesture. Like that nod.

"Yes, please, sir," said Mr. Farrant, his grey dignity on him like a robe as he handed his ward over to justice.

Well, that finished my programme of letters and book-marking. When Mr. Farrant had gone, I felt it my first duty to turn off the heat for the little chap standing lonely and disconsolate before me. Nothing was proved against him yet, anyway, and I couldn't see why he should go on wriggling in his private hell till something was proved—and maybe not even then. For his sake, as well as on every other account, I couldn't refuse the commission put on me by the oaken prophet Farrant; and I was pretty certain my examination of Jim would be a little less like that of an angry Jehovah.

I put my desk chair by the empty hearth, to make the interview as unofficial as I could.

"Did you take the money, Jim?" I asked.

The little boy shook his dark head.

"No, sir."

"Then I suppose you wouldn't mind turning out your pockets in front of me?"

A look of innocent surprise came into the dark eyes. He made a little movement with his hands.

"I haven't got any pockets."

True enough. He was wearing a pair of short blue pants, which he showed had no pockets, being sewn up the seam where pockets usually are, and a grey jersey. But wait a minute. I pointed to the jersey.

"You've got one pocket, Jim."

It was a very small one, put on more for ornament than use at the bottom of the jersey. Jim looked down, put his hand to the pocket and turned it towards me.

"There's nothing in there," he said.

But there was. We both saw it.

"What's that?" I asked.

He took it out—a tiny screwed-up ball of paper—and gave

it to me with that air of deep and fully co-operative innocence. I took it and opened it out. It was paper which had been wrapped round a sweet.

"Toffee-paper," I said.

Jim nodded agreement.

"Where did you get the toffee?" I asked.

At this point the battle began. We became a pair of friendly players of a kind of hide-and-seek. I had got hold of a clue—the only clue—which yet might be worth nothing at all. But I couldn't let go of it. Jim, who had the advantage of knowing everything where I knew nothing, knew how far the toffee-paper had committed him. He was only a boy who knew a great deal about schoolmasters and the way they conducted this kind of interview. I was only a man who knew something about boys and the way they coped with people like me. Jim, for some time ahead, had to foresee my every move and prepare for it, and this he did with enormous agility, as if I had in physical fact been chasing him, and he doubling round and just evading my clutch.

With a big boy, especially if he happened to be a rascal, the technique could have been different. But Jim was a very small boy, and I only wanted to clear the matter up, not to shoot Jim down in flames. I repeated my question.

"Where did you get the toffee?"

"A boy gave it to me."

"What boy?"

Jim knew it mustn't be a boy in school, for that would make it too easy. I could check at once.

"A big boy," he said.

"Does he come to this school?"

"No."

"Has he left?"

"He never came here."

As this was the only boys' school in town, that reply was one up to Jim, for it pushed me into the great unknown of boys who might have attended school anywhere, from Coketown to Eton; so if there was a great net which schoolmasters

collectively managed for the purpose of catching naughty boys, I had had it. For all Jim knew, there might be ; school-masters were wily double-crossing people. But if it was so, Jim was out of it by the flick of a fin.

“ What is this boy’s name ? ”

Jim shook his head. He wasn’t going to know too much about this shadowy benefactor.

“ I don’t know his name, sir.”

“ Does he work in the town ? ”

Safe enough, that sounded. Jim settled for it.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Where ? ”

“ I don’t know, sir.”

“ How do you know he works here ? ”

“ I think he does.”

“ Why ? ”

“ He wears working clothes.”

“ Does he ? What sort ? ”

“ Well . . . working clothes.”

Fair enough. Jim and I knew, didn’t we, what working clothes were like. Don’t let’s waste time over common ground. But I persisted.

“ Does he wear overalls ? ”

Jim thought, and after all, an act of remembering looks very much like one of anticipation. Dare he let this chap wear overalls. Yes. Certainly. Why not ?

“ Yes, sir.”

He was right, you know. The information was no more use to me than a bland smile.

I changed ground. I knew I was home now. It remained for Jim to agree with me.

“ Where do you see him when he gives you the sweets ? ”

Jim promptly rejected plurals like that.

“ He only gave me that one, sir.”

In all the long years of my schoolmastering life, I have never sold to a single boy the idea that “ a long time ago ” and “ only once ” are not acceptable excuses. Boys cling with

the force of instinct to the belief that Time not only cures all ills, but also reduces in importance the most heinous deeds. Good old Time.

I decided on disbelief duly expressed.

"But, Jim," I said gently, "this chap—do you see him every day?"

On his side, Jim rejected the Theory of the Single Apparition as unlikely to go well.

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"On my way home."

"Yes . . . but exactly where?"

"By the church."

"In Poplar Road?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, he *must* have given you sweets more than just once?"

Jim hesitated.

"Two or three times, I think."

It seemed safe to give me that, to settle the indigestion of unbelief.

"What does he say to you when he gives you the sweets?"

Jim didn't see the point of that question, but it was going to make a great demand on his imagination if he wasn't careful now.

"He didn't say anything, sir."

"I see." I did a recap. "So you meet this boy, who works in the town, every day near the church?"

Jim nodded. How tedious I was being.

"Then he stops and you stop, and without a word, he gives you a sweet?"

"Sometimes."

"Two or three times?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why does he give you sweets?"

Why does it rain one day, and not the next? Why is there such a thing as luck in human affairs?

Jim shook his head hopelessly at that one.

"I don't know, sir."

"Although he doesn't speak to you, you know what he looks like?"

Jim really couldn't say ~~that~~ he shut his eyes in ecstasy at the coming gift and so did not see the benefactor. He settled for incompetence as an observer, and fell back on the expression which foils the wildest schoolmaster.

"I don't know, sir."

If I held the appointment of Schoolboy's Defending Counsel in this country, I would advise all my clients to keep on saying that.

"I don't know, sir."

I had an intransigent Not-Knower in school some time ago, a fat red boy, always in trouble, called Tom Wilker. If there was mischief done, I could be pretty certain Tom had either done it or knew all about it. When I sent for him, Tom would reply to every question with that foiling answer:

"I don't know, sir."

If I had asked him what his name was, that would have been his answer. He left me to collect what evidence I could, and threw all his weight on the circumstantial, aware that schoolmasters, unlike judges, are very reluctant indeed to take action on anything short of admission of guilt.

So little Jim didn't know what his sweet-giving friend looked like. I suggested characteristics.

"Dark hair?"

Agreed.

"Light blue eyes?"

Certainly, if that's what you like.

The most contradictory physical features would have been agreed by Jim, because, agile runner though he had been, he was beginning to tire. Besides, he knew as well as I did that he had put up a good but finally unconvincing performance.

I changed ground again, but for other reasons.

"Do you like Mr. and Mrs. Farrant?"

"No, sir," said Jim promptly, showing no amazement at

the change of subject, but illustrating again his understanding of schoolmasters.

"Why not?"

He was silent.

"Are they unkind to you?"

I knew they were not.

"No, sir," said Jim.

"Then why don't you like them?"

"They won't let me play indoors."

That I could understand. The Farrants were old people living in a small house, and it might very well be a misery for the three of them on a rainy day. Strength for the rigours of parenthood, natural or technical, belongs to the young.

"But you wouldn't want Mrs. Farrant to lose her money."

Jim shook his head without speaking.

"Would you help her to find it if you could?"

When I asked that question, Jim was looking down at the floor. Suddenly he raised his head, fixed his dark eyes on me, came swiftly over to me and put his hands on my knees as I sat in my chair.

"I took the money, sir," he said.

A great relief came into my mind, following hard on the relief in his. The friendliness and manhood of his movement and words touched me very deeply. Affection swept away the jiggery-pokery of our late suspicions and evasions. I felt as if the relief were from pain, and spoke instinctively and accordingly.

"That's better," I said.

For a few seconds we were silent. Jim had done all he could, and rested therefore—on the mercies of another human being. I—the drive of the enquiry spent—looked for wisdom for the rest of my duty.

"Where is Mrs. Farrant's purse, Jim?" I asked at length.

What a life it is; from the sublimity of confession and trust to the comedy of physical arrangements.

"Under the wood in the shed," said Jim simply. "I hid it there."

Now if there were to have been any punishment for Jim's sin, it was not only not my business to inflict it, but it was quite outside my right to do so, for the offence was not a school affair, but a domestic one in which Mr. Farrant had sought my aid. I was, however, anxious now to do all I could to secure for Jim the charity which I would have accorded him if it had been for me to determine the last step.

I therefore wrote to Mr. Farrant, telling him where he would find his wife's purse, and recommending Jim to the old prophet's mercy on the ground that he had told me of his own free will where the money was.

Perhaps I stretched several points in the little boy's favour in so saying, but I couldn't help feeling, first, that the recovery of the money would be sweeter than the prospect of making Jim unhappy; and second, that the old couple owed both the boy and me something for the interview just over.

(In the summer holidays following this incident, Jim died from the effects of a motor accident. He was crossing the road at a busy point when a car containing a couple on their honeymoon knocked him down and he died from the injuries he received. God rest his quiet soul. If he had lived to manhood, he would not have been a criminal. He was not, as we have seen, that most horrible of unreal creatures, a Juvenile Delinquent, though under certain other circumstances, he might have died with a label upon him; an epitaph ill-deserved and official; "Died while on Probation.")

Jim had no sooner left me, I had no sooner drawn the English essay books of my class towards me for a first reading, than there came a single knock on my door, it opened, and the humorous face, long and quizzical, of Mr. Preen looked round it.

"Can you spare me a moment?" he asked, in that soft musical voice which sounded so unlike the sound which ought to have come from a man who had spent a year of his life in the police force.

"Certainly," I said. "Come in."

He came into the room, closing the door with a movement

of two hands, suggesting great caution. Not that there was anything about the present moment to demand caution. He always did things in that way. Preen had flavour for me. I liked his quizzical humour and always looked for the unpredictable when he called on me.

"This is quite unofficial," he said.

I nodded towards a chair.

"Sit down."

"It could wait till after school."

"You said a moment," I reminded him, with a smile.

"Well . . . yes . . . perhaps two or three."

He sat down, disposing his great length on the chair like a kindly jocular python. He was about thirty, and I always imagined that criminals dealt with by him must have formed a very favourable estimate of the humanity of the Law.

"It's about nicknames," he said.

"A venerable practice," I replied. "Boys always give one another nicknames, and as long as they're not actually obscene. . . ."

He waved his hands, smiled and spoke softly.

"No. Not the boys' names for one another," he said.

"Oh, I see. What they call us, you mean."

"Exactly."

"Well, that's just as ancient and pardonable, so long as . . ."

"They're not too obscene?"

"No. As long as we don't catch them at it."

"Quite so. But do you know what they do actually call us?"

"I've never given the matter a thought. I begin to gather that you do know?"

He wagged a bit of paper in his hand.

"The lot," he said with satisfaction. "And they're very good."

"It's this police thing of yours," I suggested.

He nodded with that sweet smile.

"I do miss police work a bit, you know," he said. "And I've just been doing a bit for practice."

"Leave that list with me, will you?" I suggested.

With a smile he put it on the desk and left me. I glanced at the first item. Preen was an orderly man and his police training had not been wasted. I imagined he had his priorities right. The paper said, in his neat handwriting:

Headmaster . . . The Old Man.

Then followed the name of my Deputy and the rest of the staff in order. I grinned with malicious delight at the inexplicable rightness of the boys. I looked with special interest for the name of Mr. Bryan. They called him Jane. That was all.

I slipped the list into a drawer, and dipped my marking-pen into red ink again. Those nicknames were good. They supported the theory that the boys made no mistakes in their summary of men. In a nickname they could convey affection or contempt with maximum economy of means. If a man had a Christian name for which he had censured his parents for years, a name which gave him private shudders, that was the name the boys used amongst themselves, if he was not liked. Equally, when a teacher had their affection and respect, they would use his plain strong Christian name like a compliment.

It appeared that to the little physical shortcomings of their favourites, they were blind, even if the man's defects yelled to be satirised in a devastating nickname. Some of the names were instant in their effect and point; some were examples of the most far-fetched fantasy, animal, vegetable or mineral, but always, the aptness was obvious. Sometimes a lesson provides the association, as in the case of an English teacher labelled Gobbo for generations of boys, the later ones having no idea how this application of the name originated. Now and then a name would occur so meaningless that nothing but its queer angular sound made it seem fitting, as in the case of a Classics master of the true name of Smithers who was known to the boys as Tmasimodo.

The boys do use all the banal nicknames like Nobby, Spud, Lofty, Tubby, but much more, they employ an immediate

creative force of their own, springing from a pitiless observation, weighing and measuring men in the scales of a friendly or contemptuous estimate.

It was a troublesome period, and I was not to have a continuous five minutes to myself. I had managed to mark four books, beginning with the essay of Eric Fife, who had given me several pages of his exquisitely neat script and clear strong prose, which asked for nothing but a couple of suggested improvements in punctuation and composition, a tick at the bottom of the last page and a nine out of ten mark.

An astute member of my class carried out an investigation into my marking method one day and made a discovery of what he thought startling import. He sought me out to tell me of it.

"Sir," he said, "nobody ever gets full marks out of you. Nine out of ten is the highest you ever give."

"True enough," I agreed.

"Well," he said, "doesn't *anybody* ever deserve ten out of ten?"

"If I gave ten out of ten," I suggested, "that would mean that I thought it was perfect in all ways, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "I suppose it would."

"It's an imperfect world," I told him. "Besides, boys who got ten out of ten might think two dangerous thoughts."

He looked enquiringly at me.

"They might think they needn't make any more effort to improve; and they might reckon I had no more to teach them."

With a look—very right in the circumstances—of deep suspicion and doubt, he went away, if not sorrowing, at least a trifle unsatisfied.

I was just opening the fifth book when I heard yet another knock at my door. Oh well.

"Come in!"

There entered a lady of about forty-five whom I did not know. The one thing I did know at a glance was that she was a mother come to make a complaint. I always try to make this kind of interview as easy for the caller as I can, because

it is no joke to visit a school with a complaint. To do such a thing, you have to take a resolve based on an extreme view of the case that troubles you, and you need to screw up your courage to the sticking-point. Everybody has in his time attended school as a pupil, and even a hardened adult feels a certain sinking of the heart and a dropping away of the years when he enters school premises. The same old school smell of chalk and dust and ink strikes the nostrils with an unbidden and unwanted nostalgia, raising the fears and ennui of years ago. All around are the too-well remembered sounds, voices from one classroom, saying poetry or tables or some awful collective thing, a teacher booming away in another. The stairs and corridors are the chilly, official, and maybe stern brethren of those trodden so long ago. Where, the visitor asks himself in a trembling tone of mind for which he heartily despises himself, where in all this desert of times past is the central figure, the busy, frowning and bespectacled man who runs the place and into whose ears alone one must pour one's complaints? Some craven corner of the heart cries "Let's clear out of here," to which the adult in you replies with a snort, and puts on an air of defiance, crossness, airiness or whatever comes most naturally to conceal the shrinking child from the stern eye of the Headmaster.

When I saw my visitor, I rose and smiled.

"Good afternoon," I said.

"Good afternoon," replied my guest with no shadow of a smile. It was clearly a serious matter which brought her to school.

There is an interesting difference between visits of complaint as paid by men and women respectively. Usually, the men come with no preparation except the plain statement of the grievance, and rely thereafter on their mother wit to deal with the conversation. But women, more emotionally conditioned about such things, quite often arrive steamed-up and with a mind full of a previously prepared statement of what they have to lay before a headmaster, not always reckoning with what he may say . . . or desire to say in reply.

"Will you sit down?" I said to my caller.

This is a normal courtesy everywhere, but it has deeper meaning in a case like this. To begin with, breath will not always serve the demands of both locomotion and strong feeling, and needs the help of a sitting position. Sitting, moreover, is an aid to civilised communication. It is very difficult to carry on a stand-up row while seated. I have known people, usually men, who knew that fact as well as I did, and ominously declined a seat. My present visitor took the chair I offered. I looked at her with interest, because there is no such thing as an uninteresting human being; and with kindness because I knew the force of all that I have told here, and was anyway ready and willing to hear what she had to say, whatever it might be, and deal justly with it either way.

"I don't like having to complain," she began. That opening I have heard a thousand times, and it is always said sincerely.

"Please tell me what it's about," I said. "If I can help you, I will."

"I have a daughter at the girls' school," she said.

"What is your name?" I asked.

I am always slightly astonished that any stranger should begin an interview with me without telling me that for a start. Still . . .

"I'm Mrs. Witcomb," she said. My question seemed to throw her a little, and she looked at me without speaking for a few seconds, as if my question was part of a drill you have to go through if you want to tell a public servant anything at all.

"Your daughter," I prompted.

"Yes. She's only fourteen. . . ." That "only" told me the rest of the tale. Young lovers again. "And one of your boys pesters her all the time. He waits for her coming out of school and hangs about our gate. We put up with it for quite a time, but now it's past a joke and I made up my mind to come and see you."

"Do you know the boy's name?"

"Oh yes. We know him . . . and his parents . . . quite well. They're very nice sort of people, but we can't put up with Elsa being worried and teased like this. It isn't as if it only happened now and again. It's every day . . . two or three times. The girl can't come out of the house or go shopping but what this boy must be there to chase her. It's too much. We've all been children, but in my time, if a boy had so much as spoken to me without permission, he'd have been punished."

"The boy's name?" I insisted gently.

"Vernon Creditt."

One of my class. Like Elsa, fourteen. Tribally, I instantly had a secret feeling of loyalty towards him, and felt a sorting out of the factors going on in my mind, a disposition of the troops, so to speak. However, this decent citizen Mrs. Witcomb had come to me for help. I must give it.

"I'll look into it now," I said. "Please wait here for a few minutes."

I left the room and went along to the large room where Mr. Santaya was taking my class and two others for music. The sound of boys singing "Who is Sylvia" came to my ears as I approached. It was not only almost appropriate; it was also very sweet, for Santaya knew his business. I opened the door, and there in the midst of the choristers sat the assassin of Mrs. Witcomb's peace, the relentless pursuer of her daughter, Vernon Creditt.

Excusing myself to Santaya, I beckoned to Vernon. To you that may be only a sentence. To the boys it was a matter of great curiosity, and to Vernon an affair of disagreeable uncertainty. What does the Old Man want is a query of perpetual interest. There is never any telling what he has found out about you, and until you know, by his words, what it is, you cannot be at ease about what it thank goodness isn't.

Vernon and I stepped outside the door, which I closed. He was a small boy for fourteen, well-dressed, clerkly in prospect, with dark hair well brushed back from his forehead. His dark eyes looked at me, troubled in their depths. He was a

very nice chap, mature and sensible ; and one of my large tribe anyway.

"Creditt," I said, "Mrs. Witcomb complains that you follow Elsa about all the time. You won't let her alone, and you cause the family and the girl a great deal of annoyance. What have you to say to that ?"

Creditt, not a boy of rapid thought but of great integrity, looked down, his face wrinkled and troubled. I could see him as he might well be in twenty years, married perhaps to this woman Elsa, employed as a faithful confidential clerk, and raising a family with every bit as much care and solicitude as Mrs. Witcomb tried to do. It is a fascinating exercise to see grown people as they were at school, and schoolchildren as they may be when they are adults. It is also a practice that makes many dark places plain. I thought that amidst the trouble in Creditt's face there was a look which spoke of the base ingratitude and treachery of the female of the species. I saw him take a resolve.

"She asks me to go with her, sir," he said.

"What ! Every day ?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he said, in outraged tones, such as any man might use when he finds that his sweetheart had defended herself by scalping him in the assembly of her family.

"Do you mean to say that you follow this girl about at her explicit invitation ?" I said.

"She writes to me and asks me to meet her—she writes every day," said Creditt.

You may blame him for his lack of gallantry. You ought not to do so. He was seeing the absent Elsa in an excessively unfavourable light.

"Have you got the letters ?" I asked.

He looked miserable. He wished now that he had said nothing about the correspondence. But now I was his advocate, not his judge.

"Yes, sir," he said, in low tones.

I held out a hand—that undeniable hand of the school-master, the expert in confiscation.

"Give them to me," I said.

He looked astonished as well he might. Had nobody ever written to me every day?

"I haven't got them all here, sir," he said.

"Give me any you have got," I said.

With a kind of fussy alacrity, he brought out of his coat pockets a collection of half a dozen little notes, written on scraps of exercise paper, and passed them over to me. O Elsa. O power and its unscrupulous exercise.

"I've no wish to read these notes, Creditt," I told him. "But may I take it that they all make some kind of appointment with you?"

"You can read them, sir," said Creditt. "There's nothing wrong in them."

"I'm sure there isn't," I replied. "But I only want to clear you with Mrs. Witcomb, not to interfere in your friendships."

He looked, I thought, unreasonably grateful. I couldn't help wondering what he and Elsa would say to one another when, if ever, they met again. I comforted myself by reflecting that the great conspiracy of children against adults would probably unite them and put an agreeable complexion on all that had passed.

"All right," I said finally. "Go back to your class and leave this to me."

When I went into my room again, Mrs. Witcomb was sitting just as I left her. Maybe she had read the dull notices on my board, considered the décor of my study, collected all the small sounds which had reached her ears, and thought once or twice that I was a long time.

I sat down at my desk and laid the notes down before me.

"These notes," I said, "are from your daughter to this boy. They all contain invitations to meet her."

Mrs. Witcomb's face slowly flushed as I spoke. I now began to feel sorry for Elsa. Life is a conflict of loyalties indeed. Still, I had settled for Creditt, our common manhood, and—a slow starter in this case—the naked truth. I passed Mrs. Witcomb the notes.

"May I leave the matter in your hands now?" I asked.

She rose and popped the documentary evidence into her handbag.

"You certainly may," she said grimly. "I'm sorry to have put you to all this trouble."

I opened the door for her. It had been one of those conversations concerning whose end there was common agreement. As she went, Reggie Firth appeared in the corridor and rang the bell for change of lesson, without knowing that to me it sounded like a knell for Elsa.

I had provided what seemed to be accepted as the complete defence for Vernon Credit. That was as much my affair as to have indicted him on a charge of letting first love turn him into a great nuisance if he had been wholly guilty of such an offence. So now I was free to regret that the matter had ever come to the notice of Elsa's family and myself at all.

This gentle little enchantment of exploration enters into the school life quite clearly at a certain stage, and the best thing schoolmasters can do is to keep out of the way if the explorers will let them. Nothing can be more of a secret, but the young are not always as wily as they may later become, and then the comedy gets on to the stage and its later phases may be enacted in an unwelcome publicity.

There is nothing very difficult about telling the physical facts of sex. From time to time, a parent—always a mother, by the way—has asked me to inform her son of these facts. I cannot help feeling in such cases that if she or her husband had been willing to answer their son's actual questions when they were ripe to be asked, and would, in the right circumstances of a casual candour, have been asked, it would not have become necessary for an outsider to pass on the information in a cold mass. Still, the outsider does the job in an unemotional and unsentimental manner, for the information in this case is as factual as a lesson on the products of a country or the Feudal system. The sentiments and emotions attaching to the possession of the facts are very much not his affair, any

more than it is the business of the man who makes a rifle to be concerned with the policies of war, or with the attitudes of the soldier to whom the rifle at last belongs.

In any case, the young are usually greatly embarrassed by the attempts of adults to set up attitudes and relationships in which emotion—especially the one we are discussing—has a part, and so the quickest way to erect an insuperable barrier between youth and adult is to make such an attempt.

Still, apart from occasionally being called on to give cold information, the schoolmaster must try to win the confidence, in all directions, of his boys, which means that he has to know instantly an occasion where censoriousness must be totally absent from his mind and his manner. Sometimes, his censure is expected, and he would be regarded as playing to the gallery pretty cheaply if he abrogated his right to it. Equally, he must know when to drop it. There are moments when master and boy are just two men together. The master has to recognise these moments.

One morning a Mr. Stanleigh was shown into my room. I had never met him before, although his boy, now about fourteen, had been in my school for some years.

There was about Mr. Stanleigh, a well-dressed man near forty with a keen face, a strangely confidential air. During our entire conversation I would not have been much surprised if he had suddenly cried Hist! and looked carefully round my innocent room for hidden listeners. If there had been microphones concealed in my virgin walls, he could not have been more wary. It was shortly evident, too, that he was going to tell me his story in his own way, which was the way of a writer of thrillers, handing out the facts in a pre-arranged order, concealing the denouement, and all the rest of it.

He sat down, keeping his overcoat on and resting his hat on his knee. Then he leaned forward slightly towards me and began.

"We spent our holiday," he said, "my wife, Richard and myself, at Bournemouth."

For a moment he straightened up and stared at me as if to see the effect of this remarkable statement. Responsively, I raised my eyebrows.

"Really?" I said. "At Bournemouth."

"Yes," he said deeply, nodding his head slowly. "At Bournemouth."

In the following pause, I nodded too, to help to fill it in.

"I don't know," continued Mr. Stanleigh, "if you've ever been there yourself?"

I confessed, ready with a shudder if it seemed to be called for in courtesy to my caller, that *I had been there many times*.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Stanleigh, with what sounded like a grim acknowledgment that his worst fears were realised. "Many times? Then you know the district well."

If one of my boys had committed this solecism in an essay I should have put a red-ink capital R in the margin of his book, standing for redundancy. I hardly liked to mention this to my guest, so I remained silent.

"While we were there," went on Mr. Stanleigh, "Richard asked our permission to go to Swanage, which, as you may know . . ."

"Yes, yes," I said quickly. "I know where it is."

"Right," said Mr. Stanleigh. He narrowed his eyes to mere slits. We were coming to the heart of the mystery, it was évident. "Well, we agreed to let him go. He said the bathing there was very good."

That seemed all right to me, for so it was, except that in certain adverse circumstances, the sea washes up seaweed by the ton, but I didn't wish to show off my local knowledge, or indeed commit myself in any way as yet to this slow-speaking rather sinister man. With a look of sad cunning, he pulled out of his pocket a letter and laid it on the desk in front of me. He pointed at it and we both looked at it sternly.

"The night before he was due to go to Swanage," said Mr. Stanleigh, "his mother found that in his pocket."

Well. What of it, my expression seemed to say.

"Read it," said Mr. Stanleigh.

"I'd rather you told me what's in it . . . if there's anything that concerns us," I replied.

"Concerns us?" said Mr. Stanleigh with a bitter laugh, in which I detected a little scorn of my squeamishness. He pointed again towards the letter. "That's from a girl living in this town and staying at Swanage at that time." He read my face again. "Now don't think that we mind him having a girl-friend. Not at all. Not a bit of it. What hurt us was the deception of it." He spread a wide and puzzled hand. "Why tell us lies? Why not have told the truth? We shouldn't have minded at all. No. It's him deceiving us that hurts."

Perhaps he had never heard that lying is the defence of the weak against the strong, nor the line about protesting too much. He saved me the trouble of asking what he wanted me to do about it by telling me.

"My wife and I would like you to speak to him about it," he said, still with that slow rather menacing tone. "He'll take more notice of you."

I had often heard that remark too, and always wanted to say that I thought it a shocking one. Still, if he thought I could help him and the boy, I must try.

When, after a farewell full of narrowed eyes and a small pantomime suggesting the utmost secrecy and caution, he had left me, I sent for Richard, his son. The boy was as direct in manner as his father seemed devious, a tall straight boy who, in my experience, came to the point with a bang and did not trade in small falsehoods. I told him what had passed between his father and me.

"The point seems to be," I said, "that while your parents don't object to the girl-friend angle, they are greatly hurt by being shut out of your confidence, and by being told lies."

"But they do object to a girl-friend, sir," he said. "That's why I . . . lied. They'd never have let me go if I hadn't."

"All the same," I said, "there's no excuse for lying, is there?"

"No, sir," he replied. "I'm sorry I did it."

Neither of us was banal enough to talk about the future and

moral resolutions. It would have clanged like a remark about the weather.

"Well then," I said, "there's nothing more to be said. I can leave it to you."

"Yes, sir," he said.

I observed with pleasure his straight carriage, his youth and the direct look in his eyes.

"All right," I said. "Off you go. By the way, as one man of the world to another . . ." He grinned. "Always burn your correspondence unless you particularly want the rest of us to see it."

"Thank you, sir," he said, and left me to wonder if after all I ought not to have given him a long lecture which he could have ignored and which would have kept me right outside his confidence altogether.

These incidents are not supposed to illustrate that the female is the chooser and the pursuer, but they certainly demonstrate for the information of teachers that a girl of fourteen is very much older than her exact contemporary amongst the boys.

Apart from the fact that she makes her own selection and has the most vivid sense of values about the available boy population, she is experienced in the delights and intricacies of romantic thinking, she can develop a fantasy of youth and manly beauty with the best of her older sisters, and clap it with force and resolution upon the eager and curious young male of her own generation. She is often a fine writer of the most touching love epistles, fit for the eye and heart of older and more discriminating admirers. The boy she thus honours all too often treats her letters not as a lover should, but in the spirit of a collector. Still, the neighbouring girls' school carries on an invaluable and unresting variety of education for the boys, and whether you like it or not, you have to reckon with its existence and force.

Women are the cement of the kind of civilisation we have. It is terrifying to picture the social order we should have if women did not exist. The church would fall to pieces pretty quickly, and it is certain that many a wife is saving her husband's

soul by main force, willing him into his Sunday suit and dragging him off to service, with the grim choice in front of him of hell hereafter, or hell after Sunday supper. All charitable organisations depend heavily on feminine support ; and the social end of politics—a vastly important one, as every good politician knows—is kept going by the women. Men have shed the nineteenth century idea of Great Men, the Hero in Politics and Literature and so on, but the women have not. Perhaps they recognise what a hideous menace to a civilised order the ordinary man is, and are ready to worship the extraordinary man, not least because a good deal of his natural equipment is feminine anyway. Maybe they think that a Great Man is at heart a Great Woman, but much more attractive for his masculine attributes.

Women insist on standards of cleanliness, a nice hospitality and a respect for all the powers that make for stability. They put fine cloths on tables, and head their husbands off unsuitable friendships. They dress themselves with individual taste and discrimination and refuse to go out with a man who has not enough self-respect to wear a decent suit.

Without them, the whole social scene would be doggy, snug, matey, rough-and-ready, liable to burst into flames of wrath at any moment, and totally devoid of any single influence that was not directly related either to the five senses or the most enjoyable of the seven deadly sins.

All women were once girls, and this civilising effort begins very early. God bless them—if they were boys instead of girls, you'd have to call them prigs. The habit of writing things on nameless walls is sometimes found even in schools. It has to be suppressed at once, of course. Anyway, materials for writing are supplied, and writing—under reasonable controls—is properly taught in the classrooms. We all know the kind of thing boys—who will in due course become adult shaggy males—write on walls if they take to that shameful industry. But an advanced woman colleague of mine told me that she had an outbreak of wall-writing in her school, and that it consisted entirely of romantic utterances, deeply incised

arrows shot through laboriously carved hearts, and all the touching art of the valentine. What a triumph of civilised emotion over artistic environment !

And of course, when I see an untidy lad begin to mend his ways, arriving at school with a cleanliness as self-conscious as the uniform of salvation ; with his hair sleekly watered and brushed back, and his tie quite notably marking his reformation, even if borrowed from an older brother, I do not imagine for a hopeful second that it is because my words have at last had some effect. I know that the great taming civilising process has begun, and that his young manhood is in those chains which he rattles in his inward ear with secret glee, and which he permits to be shaken in public with a mixture of pride, shame and humour.

This mixture is odd, touching and amusing. I was talking to some of my oldest pupils one day about this enchanting matter of first love. They stood round my desk as I sat there at break, and the moment of reciprocal relaxation caught us unawares. They found me ready to talk without my surplice on, so to speak. I found them in the mood.

In the atmosphere of the conversation was their pride at being old enough—that is, men enough—to have girl-friends. Their laughter told that they saw the whole thing as an aspect of the human predicament. And shame ? One of them said :

“ I just can't say the word. It sounds so soft.”

“ It's a very easy one to say,” I replied. “ Love.”

They all laughed to hear a headmaster say this word—the official and accepted label for whatever it was we were talking about.

“ Yes. I know,” said the first speaker. “ Still . . . I can't.”

“ That's silly,” I said. “ You've got all the wrong ideas about it. There's nothing soft about it in itself, is there ? ”

“ No. Probably not. But the way people use it. In the films too . . . and stories . . . there ought to be another word that ordinary people could use.”

“ There are other words.”

“ What are they ? ”

"Affection, fondness, attraction. . . ."

"Yes. But they don't mean the same thing as . . ."

"Go on."

". . . love."

Much laughter. Especially from the speaker.

"But this word love doesn't mean only one thing, does it ?
It means a dozen."

"Not the way we're talking about it."

"All right then. Get used to speaking the word. Like any other word it stands for an idea, so if you have the idea, you've got to use the word. You don't find it hard to say "hate," do you ?"

"No. But it's easier to get used to the idea of . . . you know . . . than to the word."

There are teachers who greatly prefer having a class of young children. Indeed, there is great charm about a class of young boys. The invisible forces in the room are few, the little boys are not far away from the nursery, and their main anxiety is to please and so succeed. But slowly up through the school the shadow of the world deepens, so that when a teacher is facing a class of boys in their middle teens, he does well to remember what is in the room with him and them.

There is a brisk life going on in front of him, motivated by curiosity, eagerness to grow up, interest in new satisfactions, the drive to explore and experience. If for a few seconds, that unseen world could make itself visible, the teacher would himself get a salutary experience. The strange mysterious fascinating wraiths from the girls' school would become solid and real as the enemies of a dreary lesson. The unlawful desire for a secret smoke would suddenly put a cigarette into the mouth of a boy bored beyond toleration. A dry story, suggested by something the teacher had said would suddenly be told, to the unmeasured delight of the now-silent and restrained audience. A boy who was drowsily wondering about the point would up and ask the teacher why he didn't get somebody to sew that bottom button on for him, since it had been missing for at least a month, maybe longer.

And beyond all that, the secret civilisation of the boy-world, with its hates and loves, its hobbies and interests, its freedoms and limitations, its projects and designs, its clubbery and taboos, its brightly-new and often mistaken view of the adult world, would instantly become clear to the teacher in lines and colours which he could not mistake. What a moment of priceless revelation it would be, and what a revolution in teaching methods it would instantly produce.

The best and most sympathetic adult can only speak to boys in terms of his past. So he is a great sport and used to knock at people's doors and run away with the best of them. All right. But he doesn't do it any more, not because he would get the rawest deal from the police as the one who ought to know better, but because he doesn't want to ; which is the fatal disqualification for being considered one of the boys, and talking to them as such.

The boy world may not be another Eden, but grown-ups are shut out of it most effectively. When I am trying to be a helpful grown-up, I understand perfectly what the position is. I am a human being talking freely without expecting the same freedom from those others. It is as if they surrounded me and listened to me wearing black masks, keeping tight mouths, and taking from me that which they can translate their own way for their own uses, determined alike by their need, their experience and the degree of their respect for my common sense.

Of all the matters which concern the boys, this one of the beginnings of love is the most difficult for adults to be sensible and helpful about. Indeed, the most helpful thing is to stand aside. Their other problems are social. This alone is intensely private. What then happens in the mind of an ordinary sensitive boy appears to him to be unique. He is the only one to whom these revelations have been made. Yes, other boys talk about it, but it is different with him. He knows it is, because his friends never talk to him in a way that suggests they feel about it as he does. As for grown-ups, well really . . . the idea that they know anything about it is so obscene

that he turns away from it before it gets mixed up *rather* seedily with his experience, which he finds to be exciting, yes, but chiefly so bright, so very new and clean.

Two men tried to assist me in my youth. One was a romantic Welsh minister, well on in middle life, fat, bald and rosy; a man who had published his sermons for their poetic appeal. After dinner one night at my home, when I was alone with him for a while, he raised the matter of love. I was embarrassed for him, but listened with a strained politeness. With his chubby hands, he flapped his point.

"Love," he said, "is like a beautiful rose. It comes to us, a lovely bud, full of rich promise. Then, as we get older, it slowly opens and unfolds until it comes to its exquisite fullness of beauty. Then it gives us deep delight." He looked baldly serious as he reached the climax of his illustration, and held his hands apart. "We must tend the rosebud," he concluded, "and not wreck its beauty by roughly using it, and trying to tear the heart out of it."

At this moment my mother came into the room, smiled on us agreeably as we sat there so close in conversation, and mentioned coffee.

If he returned to life now and said this all again to me, I should offer polite congratulations on the aptness and poetry of his illustration. Forty years ago, I was glad when my mother came in, and this prophet who seemed so remote from the grounds of his prophecy was obliged to fall silent. I felt very deeply indeed that his words were a civil impertinence, and denied hotly within myself that there was any connection between what I knew and what he had said.

The other adviser must have felt that he understood boys better, for he took as his line a kind of hearty red-blooded comradeship of physical love. I listened readily to all he had to say, taking it chiefly as a sign of the kind of man he was, which may have been an injustice. But I shut him out for ever from the world in which I was coming to move with private delight and exultation.

To cover a point before anyone else does it for me, it may

well have been that these two older men thought that all boys, and I in particular, were going about like roaring bulls, seeking whom we might devour. If so, they were more amusing characters than I then supposed, and ought to have used their eyes before their tongues, even at the expense of not feeling like missionaries and not being successfully and traditionally comical.

Perhaps the most important single thing a schoolmaster has to tell himself, and especially in this matter, is that the young have many tribulations, but none greater than this: that they are the only section of the population which has to put up with a vast amount of unsolicited advice, without right of retort.

Advice, unless it is what one wanted to hear, is a great bore even if asked for. When it isn't, the only thing to do with it is what the young in fact always do. They listen to it with a restive air when it comes from intimates, and with a polite dead-pan when it comes from official sources like a teacher. Schoolmasters ought to be ready to lay off all advice, and answer all questions, without enquiring as to their purpose, which should be obvious to them.

I hope this will not be mistaken. I want to convey that the elder statesman line, the old man of the tribe act must be completely detached and clinical. Advice needs to be white-tiled and well-disinfected. If we could buy and install in school an Advice Machine which when punched by the enquirer gave counsel without emotion or anxiety, it would be much used by the pupils. But the trouble about Father Confessors is that they are men and have memories, even if they are free of the lust for power which comes most copiously from hearing what it is that calls for advice.

Just for the record, it ought to be said that homosexuality is not a problem in day schools of the sort I am writing about. Very occasionally an experimental affair may come to notice, but such an event is so rare as not to be worth mention. Moreover, it is regarded by the boys as a crime against good sense and good taste, and any hope that masses of the people can

be persuaded to see it in a more tolerant light seems to be doomed from the start. This pleases me very well, though homosexuals I have met appear to regard it as a very sad state of affairs, entirely due to the reactionary thinking of headmasters.



WHEN Reggie Firth had rung the bell yesterday afternoon at the end of the first period, Mr. Santaya dismissed the singers, amongst whom were my boys, and when I went into my classroom, the sixty were already seated, ready for the next lesson.

It was five minutes past two, and for the next forty minutes, so said the timetable, we must pursue the delights of Art. I personally liked sketching and painting, but knew nothing about it. The only man who could have done them any good in the subject would have been an artist, but as we hadn't got one on the staff, I took my coat off and we started.

The monitors had put out the materials on every desk, and it was a bit of a jam too, with pencils, brushes, paint-boxes, and little jars of water.

In front of the class stood a jar of flowers, a gramophone and a table with a chair on it. You could have a go at the still life in the jar, or listen to the "Air on the G String" and paint whatever came into your mind as you listened. If these did not attract you, then you could have a shot at making a

drawing of Leslie Saverne, who at my bidding came and sat in the chair on the table, ready to model for forty minutes flat, or you could illustrate your essay written that morning.

When those who wanted to hear the music had heard it, I looked over at Wilfred Tenner, a tall boy with a beautiful voice and no more talent or liking for art than a hedgehog, and said to him :

"All right, Tenner."

He rose from his place, went to the cupboard, took out a book and then sat at my desk. He opened the book and began to read aloud in his golden voice, his one great gift.

"'At six o'clock the next day,'" he began, "'the whole body of men in the choir emerged from the tranter's door, and advanced with a firm step down the lane. . . .'"

Yes, it was. *Under the Greenwood Tree*. By Thomas Hardy. And it was Tenner's job to read the book aloud to the class in instalments during the Art lesson. Every kind of objection could be raised to this practice and this book.

A most unsuitable book for boys. No vigorous life in it. Nothing to appeal to boys at all. What an author anyway Thomas Hardy, the creator of gloom and tragedy, even not in this particular book. And who would be listening anyway?

I don't know, and I don't much care. ~~ALL THE MORE FOR THE~~ investment and perhaps somebody did listen after all. It seemed rather pleasant, with the afternoon sunshine pouring through the classroom windows, the boys bent quietly over their drawing and painting, young Saverne sitting on high with a kind of silent officiousness, and the round sweet voice of Tenner telling the Wessex story of Fancy Day and Dick Dewy and the choirmen and the past.

It felt then like a good mixture of delight, whatever it sounds like here. And I could but hope that the combination of quiet and sunshine and creative effort and Thomas Hardy and the afternoon hour might remind somebody in the future of how good it seemed to paint and listen to *Under the Greenwood Tree* ; might even induce him to look at the book again.

I could rely on Bill Casson, the happy failure of the Arithmetic lesson, to bring a little comedy into the scene.

"May I change the water in my jar, sir?" he asked.

I nodded agreement. There was a large jug of clean water near the door, and a bowl for the used and tinted water from the little jars. A boy in the front row, pressed for room, had put his jar on the floor. Eyeless, Bill Casson marched on it, gave it an unwilling kick and sent it with its contents leaping across the floor.

I gave a yell of protest. Bill, with horrified eyes, stared at the mess, and forgetting his own messy jar, tilted it so that its coloured water began to pour gently out on to the floor.

"Your own jar!" I cried. "Oh dear!"

Bill Casson did by nature what expensive Hollywood comedians contract to do for good money. He stared at me, water still dripping from his jar, saw my point, looked at the jar, put his hand to his mouth, staggered slightly and knocked yet another jar off a boy's desk. The floor began to run with the blood of rainbows, and the class roared with delight.

"Get the mop and clean it up!" I said, groaning at the mess.

Bill, with a kind of dogged resignation to his own proneness to such accidents, went off with his rolling gait to do as I had said. Order was restored and the lesson with its attendant reading went on again.

I noticed that Colin Bly, a dark-eyed heavily built boy with a dramatic face, was not getting on well. I walked quietly over to him and saw that his paper was blank.

"Why nothing done?" I whispered, so as not to disturb the reading.

He looked up at me with these great round dark eyes, so large that they took all the attention from the rest of his features.

"The subjects don't interest me," he said.

I thought for a moment, and then said:

"Come with me into the corridor."

We tip-toed out, and I closed the door on the class. I told

him—what was still vivid in my mind's eye—about the burning grain on the lorry at lunch-time.

He listened with his eyes fixed on me, seeming to burn up my words as I spoke to him.

“I could paint that,” he said.

I opened the door and we went into the room again.

Tenner was reading with a smile in his voice.

“‘And who's that young man?’ the vicar said.

“‘Tell the pa'son yer name,’ said the tranter, turning to Leaf, who stood with his elbows nailed to a book-case.

“‘Please, Thomas Leaf, your holiness!’ said Leaf trembling.

“‘I hope you'll excuse his looks being so very thin,’ continued the tranter deprecatingly, turning to the vicar again. ‘But 'tisn't his fault, pore feller. He's rather silly by nater, and could never get fat; though he's an excellent tribble, and so we keep him on.’

“‘I never had no head, sir,’ said Leaf, eagerly grasping at this opportunity for being forgiven his existence.

“‘Ah, poor young man!’ said Mr. Maybold.

“‘Bless you, he don't mind it a bit, if you don't, sir,’ said the tranter assuringly. ‘Do ye, Leaf?’

“‘Not I—not a morsel—hee, hee. I was afeard it mightn't please your holiness, sir, that's all.’”

Now I began to go round the class from boy to boy, sitting beside each one for a minute or two, partly to see what he had produced, partly to give what help I could, and also—not least—to forward that personal comprehension and knowledge between each boy and myself without which a man cannot run a school.

As a parson visits his people, so—and exactly so—must the schoolmaster visit individual boys. If he does not, they remain to him a mass of individuals without personal flavour, tone or colour; and he is to them a distant, maybe revered, but certainly unknown figure.

The schoolmaster's power, when he is addressing his boys all together at assembly, is measured by what each one of

them knows about him as a person ; individual knowledge and observation gained in personal contact. His " visiting " will sometimes be a quick chat in yard or corridor, sometimes an interview in his room, oftenest, maybe, the times when he sits with the boy in the classroom desk to help with the job in hand.

In school I am fascinated above everything by the humanity of the boys. There is nothing about them and their lives which I do not want to know. The *story* of each boy, how the luck is with him in these early days of his life, the programme of his day, how he settles the problems of his leisure—what he has to tackle in the way of difficulties with his limited experience.

And then, sitting beside a boy, I give him the chance to be, not just a member of the school, but his own true self. Near to him like that, I can observe him as closely as he sees me. The relationship is quite special, I know ; the headmaster and one of the boys. You don't care tuppence for headmasters and neither do I ; but the boys do. In these circumstances, I notice with pleasure the ways in which the boys use personality and charm in the small interview. I appreciate the skill with which they size me up and treat me. I take note of their characteristics, their hands—so important—their youth, like a feature in itself ; and read what I can of the tale already building in their faces.

Sometimes, a visit takes an unexpected turn. Once I sat down next to a boy in a lesson and a waft of tobacco came to my nostrils from my own coat, for I had recently smoked a cigarette. With professionally mistaken humour, I cried :

" Somebody's been smoking ! Who is it ? "

To my amazement, a boy put up his hand.

" I have, sir."

I put forward my hand.

" Cigarettes, please."

The unfortunate but honest lad produced a packet and gave them to me. Let us clear a mystery. Do schoolmasters smoke confiscated cigarettes or consume or enjoy confiscated

property generally? I think not. I put them in a drawer and there they moulder away unless, as rarely happens indeed, a boy on his leaving-day has the hardihood to ask for their return.

While the Art lesson was in progress, the classroom door opened, and two Old Boys looked in. I beckoned to them and they entered.

Adams and Benham. Their old selves and their new selves; and yet like every Old Boy who ever looked in to see the Old Place. A trifle wary, dressed in their best, a modest smile, hopeful but a little uncertain about reception, and of course, expert on whatever they find happening at the moment of the visit.

Extraordinary what a large number of piffling problems this Visit of the Old Boys raises on both sides. From my point of view—like every other headmaster—what I see is the modern version of the boy only the other day at school. Immediately I shall remember something about him which, because it belongs to his so remote yet so recent past, is the last thing I must mention. Parents commit this offence, but I must not, because I have not their excuses.

One day a fine handsome Flying Officer, in the magnificent kit and wear of his ranging business called on me. It was no other than Jack Sledlow, and all that came into my mind on the instant was the memory of his disconsolate first day at school when, a very little boy, he sat on my knee and wept into my handkerchief.

What a thing to remember, especially as Sledlow had been mercifully permitted to forget it, or ought equally mercifully to be allowed to do so. That one's childhood should linger on in other people's memory—or that kind of cartoon of it—is one of the good reasons for death, which sees to its decent burial.

"I was," says the autobiographer, "a very sensitive child."

"Nonsense," says the man who remembers him all too vividly, "you were a snivelling little puppy, who sulked when spoken to, turned on the waterworks at the first touch

of reality, and showed every sign of a hideously precocious misanthropy."

"My attachment to my brothers and sisters," continues the man who is recalling the inside of his childhood, "was curiously—and I am sometimes tempted to think—uniquely protective."

"Well, then," remarks the Uncle who was there, "you gave precious little sign of it, unless kicking and cuffing them, and monopolising their toys were signs."

"When I was happy," the autobiographer goes on, "—and unless something happened to make me unhappy from the *outside*, I generally was happy—there echoed in my mind a kind of half-heard music, as if I could hear great harmonies from the world around that were inaudible to others. I used to catch at these secret sounds, and as I played I would try to give them real form by singing to them."

"Oh?" observes the adult now informed, "so that was the reason of that perpetual dismal humming you used to inflict on us as you sat on your behind screening the fire from us. I used to hate it. How it went on and on; and if I remember, many a smack did you get to try and shake you out of it. It was *maddening*."

Like every other Old Boy, Adams and Benham had left in school something of themselves, and had a desire to catch sight, in the academic thickets, of these lost shadows. Besides, it is interesting to call at school and see the shackles of a discipline which no longer binds oneself, although with some Old Boys who come in to school in good robust grown-up heart, the old scenes evoke old habits of response, and a sight of the good old tyrant of the classroom is enough to start a train of over-polite reactions of which the Old Boy is half-ashamed.

That horrible briskness of the Old Man, as if one had never left school at all, that enquiry about how one is getting on which sounds like a demand for one's homework, that glance which seems to say "You may be deceiving the unsuspecting and unsophisticated world, but I, alone amongst men, can see

through you as before," all come from a man who has known one from way back.

Then a cigarette would be such a help, but can one produce a packet? Can one offer the Old Man a fag?

The fact is that the onus for the success of the operation of the Old Boy's visit rests fair and square on the headmaster's shoulders. It is he who should solve all these tiny problems, he who must forget the child and welcome the man. He must be content to be seen as the figure who does not move, in a world of figures who do, the post that sticks out of the swiftly flowing river, the permanent in the transient sphere, the one who, stuck for forty years with his own job, must be there to hear of the swift upward movement of those who stood his nonsense long enough to claim this reward now.

The headmaster ought to be the impresario of the visit, turning it from a vague stirring of an impulse into a conducted tour of the heart. He knows quite well how the Old Boy wants his visit to turn out. He must see to it that the Show goes on. Busy though he is, he must spare the time to hear what the Old Boy thinks it worth while to tell him, to admire the vast change for the better which only a blind and deaf headmaster could fail to note. What? Is this smart well-set-up man of business, so well-spoken and obviously successful the scruffy little chap who used to get everything wrong? Is this man of the world, whose *savoir-faire* glitters like an ambassador's and whose salary is twice that of a schoolmaster even on his maximum . . . is this indeed that rogue whose horrible, doom used to be prophesied in every classroom? Has he by his unsuspected brilliance snatched himself away from the very edge of the pit?

It's a poor heart that cannot rejoice when all the portents are kicked downstairs.

On these occasions I must be ready with a courtesy every bit as gentle as my visitor's. I must tell, seventy times seven if I have to, the news about the staff—what members have left or retired, what has happened to them and what is going forward in the lives of those they remember. I must make

them free of the place for an hour, and send them away able to say to the first willing listener, with that kind of delight they sought in coming, "Just the same. Hasn't changed a bit."

For the measure of their change is the total lack of change in us. A tasty delight, and not to be grudged to Old Boys.

Adams and Benham had not long left school. They probably thought it a long time, but it couldn't have been more than three years. The fact that they came together told me that the visit was the impulse of a moment. They had met in the street and probably Benham had said, "Let's go and have a look at the school." Adams, amiable and compliant as ever, had agreed, and here they were. The Old Boy who comes by himself does so much more deliberately. To the pair, the visit is perhaps as good a way of passing an hour as comes to mind at the moment, and so may be treated by me, in a spirit of kindly welcome, a half-holiday sort of a mood. But the solitary one must be taken rather more seriously, for he will certainly have thought up some business, even if he hasn't some quite specific purpose in calling.

I forthwith absorbed Adams and Benham into the lesson. They'd had the like of it before, and smilingly sat in two chairs to listen to Tenner's reading, tasting the savour of being with us yet not of us any more, seeing what it was like to see what it used to be like, as it were.

It was a quarter to three by the classroom clock. Five minutes to go to afternoon break. I stopped Tenner just as he read, in a voice undimmed by his long task :

"Chapter Five. Returning Homeward."

"You can start there next time, Tenner," I said.

With a charming air of one who had given the special service for which he was endowed, Tenner stepped down from my desk and put the book away in its place. As he turned to the cupboard, I noticed how there hung about him like a gown that agreeable official air which comes on every boy who has some special part to play in the life of the school. It doesn't matter how tough a boy is, as soon as he has an appointment to help the school, there vanishes that perfectly understandable

air of nonresponsibility, and in its place appears the label "I count around here."

I am all against the theory that a school consists of a few giants and a lot of pigmies. I am all for the opposite idea that the boys and the men are in fact work-mates. I know very well that in my school there are scores of boys who have knowledge and skills which I haven't got and couldn't be trained to have. The permissible ignorance of the school-master is a great comfort to boys. It does something to balance the account, and is besides an endearing characteristic.

"The Old Man's light went out in his study. He asked me if I knew anything about it. I soon fixed it. It was only the fuse. I don't think he knows what a fuse is. It makes you think, doesn't it?"

Even where the teacher-pupil relation is clearly uppermost, supervision should never be inhibitory. A boy with a job to do merely wants to do it, not to be weighed down with advice, tied up with do's and don'ts, and generally given the feeling that he is a lunatic with a bomb in his hand. The school-master is there to help if called on, and to offer official criticism when the job is done.

The most powerful moral agent in school is trust; not blind, happy, sentimental trust. Merely trust on the same terms as anywhere else; that is, in return for results.

I gave the order for the drawing and painting apparatus to be cleared up, waited for the unavoidable fuss about paper still wet with paint to be dealt with and to die down, and gave the class a few seconds of quiet before they went out for the afternoon break. This giving of quiet sounds so obvious that teachers like Mr. Bryan withhold the gift by mistake. Thirty, forty, fifty people cannot give it to themselves, and so the natural fuss and movement they make is taken by the inexperienced to be disorder, naughtiness, anything you like except an event in the natural order of things. It ought to be possible to supply quiet in bottles as part of the teacher's equipment.

On the label, perhaps, "A spoonful of quiet to be given

four times a day." It enables the boys to return to the order of their own minds unfettered by the clamour of events and the disturbance of necessary business and movement. It is the teacher's prescription and affair. If he can't give it, then it cannot be given at all. Then there is perpetual chaos, which I may say meets with the private disapproval of the boys who know as well as you do how a school ought to be managed, and what a good teacher ought to be able to do. After all, they have plenty of experience, a great deal of right-mindedness and some sense that the school is a department of the public life, like a hospital or a fire-station, which they will some day have the involuntary privilege of paying for.

No teacher who watches children as he ought can fail to have noticed one striking thing. Nobody is naughty and troublesome at nine o'clock when the school starts. The weakest teacher gets a new start every morning. His pupils give him a clean sheet daily, and those who at four o'clock yesterday were behaving in the classroom like so many apes under the influence of a very stimulating and exciting drug come into school the next morning quiet, demure, and ready to begin a new order of goodness and industry—if the teacher knows how to set about helping them to it.

I have watched the boys come in at nine in the morning many hundreds of times, looked at their faces, tried to read from their expressions what their starting-form is, looked for anything that might call for a word of enquiry, comment or encouragement. And as I looked, this simple truth pressed itself on my attention—if it's a bad day, it will be our fault, not theirs. Unlike their elders, the morning seems to bring no rancorous memory, no continued disappointment, no overnight design of vengeance or compensation. Every morning looks like a small dawn of creation. They can afford to start again like white light, for the young have all the time there is. I believe that the weak teacher, if he had the confidence required to ride a bicycle, could with this new morning spirit make an entirely new start; and when he had abolished

chaos and established that order in which he might help his boys, they would say with a grin :

"That's it then, chaps. We've had it."

As the day goes on, it could be graphed by a teacher-curve of effort which steadily rose in man-pounds of skill and inspiration, and a boy-curve which equally steadily declined from that morning perfection. At the top of the boy-curve you might print the joyous words "Here we are again," and at the bottom the perfectly natural ones "We want to go home."

If you want to see who is a good teacher, attend the last lesson of the day. It is then that his quality will shine, against fatigue, boredom, the rosy light of approaching release and leisure, and the glowing thoughts of pleasures close at hand. And if you'd like to try your hand at it, have a go at explaining the structure of a Petrarchan sonnet to a boy who knows he is going to the pictures when you stop talking.

When my boys had gone out to play—good old-fashioned phrase, better than break, recreation or recess, for what should they do but play?—I had a few words with Adams and Benham, the Old Boys.

It soon appeared that they had real business with me after all. It was simple but far-reaching. Could I help them to establish an Old Boys' Club? To them, simple. They had a desire, and saw the pleasure and advantages of it very clearly. I knew better than they the difficulties in the way. The two main ones would be finance to start it and run it, and interest to make it endure long enough for it not to be added to any heap of remembered failures getting in the way of new and at present unthought-of ventures.

One thing I did know, which I could not immediately tell them, and that was that Mr. French had been thinking on the same lines and when I had last spoken to him about it, he had been very keen to raise money for an Old Boys' Club, acquire a building, and, apart from the obvious activities like football and cricket, he was contemplating a club which should be open every night, certainly during the winter.

It would mean of course that all of us on the staff would have to be ready to give up one or two evenings a week to attend at the club, and though the boys would provide the bone and muscle of the institution, we would have to supply the nerves.

The Old Boys told me that there was a great deal of interest in the idea, and I promised to call a meeting to see how keen people really were.

The schoolmaster and the parson are perhaps the only professional workers who, when confronted with a proposal for social well-being in their district which will involve them in considerable sacrifice, cannot say, "Not me, chums." The request is a warrant of demand on their services, and they would not have it any other way, even if they sometimes wonder with a wry smile what would be said in similar circumstances by more closely organised trades with different aims.

Adams and Benham then left me to have a walk round the school, and I went into the corridor just as Rex Lancer was taking my cup of tea into my room.

"Lancer!" I called.

With careful hand balancing the cup, he turned his head towards me.

"Sir?"

"Bring my tea to the staff room, please."

I went along the corridor and past the cloakrooms to the door of that room sacred to the unofficial moments of the staff. I knocked and was bidden to enter in a hearty if indistinct voice. I went in and it was clear to everyone by face-telegraphy that my visit was not official.

The room was furnished in classical style, with a large table centre, some hard chairs and a few easy-chairs which suggested a late Channel crossing. Sports gear appeared in corners of the room, and on shelves erected for other purposes; although there were bookshelves, in some disarray. On the table there were one or two piles of exercise books, some newspapers, and an ashtray or two, one with a pipe laid across it.

On my entrance, Mr. French was oiling a bat while the

more volatile Mr. Preen was practising a stroke with another. Mr. Santaya was sitting deeply in an arm-chair—more by the design of the chair than intention of comfort—reading *The Times Educational Supplement*. Cups of tea stood on the table, and Mr. Graham who was on duty hastily drank his tea and went out, telling me as he passed why he was going.

Mr. Aintree, my deputy, was pinning a notice on the board, showing the ensuing week's order of duties. Aintree was a short dark man with great ability in the clerical way, which was a good thing, for I have very little of it. Not quite true, that. I can do it as well as another, and if I thought it either interesting or important, I shouldn't admit that I couldn't or wouldn't do it. I merely demonstrate that I'm too lazy to do it and that I make use of the talents of others who do not think it dreary to make up lists and catalogues of routine.

I went over to Mr. French and told him what the Old Boys had proposed. I always enjoyed talking to him and watching his bright response.

"Just what I want to do," he said. "How do you suggest we proceed?"

"Let's find out the strength of the desire," I said. "I'll call a meeting of Old Boys, and you run it from there."

He nodded, put down the bat, pulled out his cigarettes and offered me one, taking and lighting one himself when I declined.

"I can get the money all right," he said. "That's easy enough."

"We shall want a good deal," I said. "Your idea is to have club premises and open every night, isn't it?"

"Yes. But I'll run concerts and dances. We'll soon have enough to open the club. After that, it must support itself from subscription and canteen."

Evidently he had the whole project cut and dried. "All right," I said. "If I call a meeting for next Wednesday at eight, here in school, will that suit you?"

"Perfectly," he replied.

I turned to take up my cup of tea from the table where Rex

Lancer had put it. The subject of the club was for the moment closed, and as he always did, Mr. French ended the conversation on his side with a smile of astonishing gentleness and returned to his oiling of the bat.

I looked round the staff room. Most of the men were there, or had come in since I entered. There was one exception. That was Mr. Bryan. He seldom used the room and had his tea taken to his classroom. The boys were all out in the yard, with Mr. Graham to act as referee in disputes, first-aid man in small accidents, and finisher by whistle of the period of leisure, not only for the boys but for us too.

I fell into conversation with Stevens, who took the smallest boys. He was a man in the fifties, handsome with his grey hair and small moustache, and I gave him to the small boys every year as they entered the school because of his great gentleness and kindness of nature. He was expert with them, and I knew that their troubles would not ruffle or puzzle him. He not only enjoyed having charge of them, but expected it on the ground of his suitability for the job. He thought—not without justice—that nobody else could break them in, as he called it, as well as he. It was a very tender breaking-in, for he was a motherly kind of man, who seemed to me often to be fussy with them when he might reasonably have been a little tougher. On his side, he put something into his manner with his class which suggested that he was protecting them against less sensitive people until by his own processes he had prepared them for the rough winds to come.

Whenever he and I were together for a chat, as now, he would have some story to tell me about one of the little boys—some amusing remark, some understandable error, some incident throwing more light on one of them. While he told me, there would be a ripple of laughter in his voice and a look—not arch, but something like it—in his eyes, as one interpreting to a full adult the entertaining capers of the young whom he alone understood well enough to turn their boring behaviour into a good and acceptable story.

I enjoyed being treated as a rather dense if well-meaning

and blundering headmaster by this honest and lovable man, who spent his life getting small boys over the bridge between being taught by women and being led into manhood by men.

As we stood in the staff room with our cups of tea, he began to tell me about young Mellersh, a boy of great beauty and distinction, about whose paternity there was some doubt, but who was said to be the son of a noble family who did not see fit to acknowledge him. From our point of view, he lived with an aunt. It seemed that Stevens had been telling them, with all his simple drama and colour, about Vesuvius, when young Mellersh rose in the midst and said :

“My aunt has actually seen the volcano in eruption, and she says it is a remarkable sight.”

This from an eight-year-old had tickled Stevens a great deal more than it had the class, who either thought it was no more than they would have expected from Mellersh, or else preferred the more direct and forcible descriptions of Stevens, who hadn't actually seen the volcano at all.

While Stevens was talking to me and claiming my ears, my eyes were with my colleagues, the men whose lives were tied with mine in all we were trying to do in the school. Here in this assembly if anywhere was the heart of our matter. The youngest of them was in the twenties ; the oldest approaching sixty, and the rest of us between these extremes of age and experience.

I often wondered, and sometimes asked, what led them to take up teaching. The person who does so must know, at the beginning, three things for certain. The first is that he has chosen poverty and obscurity for his professional lot. Oh yes, I know that poverty is a relative term, and that no teachers are reported to be actually starving. But they certainly belong to the order of those who provide a market for second-hand cars, stay with relations for their holidays and cannot do all they would for their children. Not all of them ; and not single women, for whom the profession is not a bad bet. But married men with several children are not at the same time single women. The second thing they know for certain is

their income figure in any future year of their service. They will not receive, like their brothers in business, little bonuses at Christmas, or discover any perquisites which swell regular income. And the third thing they know is that the chances against their becoming heads of schools, other things being equal, are about twenty to one against.

So there is not much money or fame going. What there is of the former can be computed by the published scale tables, the providers of a rueful certainty and the destroyers of a rosy hope. And there is not much hope of promotion for most of them. The recruit to teaching must therefore decide to enter on other considerations than these. I am always interested in what they may be. I know what they ought to be. They ought to be a desire to teach and a genuine fondness for children. And happily for all of us, that is generally what they are.

In teaching, you cannot get level with anybody by calling canny in your efforts. If you should try to do so, you become so bored and unhappy that you might as well cure your own disease by putting your back into your job. Besides, as your clients are children, sitting right there in front of you, the offence of bad work or going slow takes rank with stealing the pennies out of a blind man's cup. You have not even the satisfaction open to persons in industry of idling without seeing what that does to a lot of other quite innocent people.

Even if you had a pupil whose father was on strike and had taken the bacon off your breakfast plate, you could not retaliate by going easy on his child's education. This illustrates finally and completely why the nation gets no trouble from its teachers. The children do in real fact take the fight out of a teacher, for the position is always that nothing must happen to the disadvantage of the child. Besides, if you are a teacher, you get to like the little beggars, and forget that you are paid so little that you cannot afford to keep the kind of company which would not only best please you, but which is your professional right: or that you will have to postpone foreign travel so long that when you get it, either you can't

enjoy it, or your health is a menace every minute you're out of the country.

These men in the staff room ; he heart of our matter. What made them tick was clearly neither money nor the prospect of promotion, not to say fame. Amongst them there was no stratum of resentment for me to avoid in my dealings with them. If I asked for unpaid overtime, it was readily given by common consent and agreement. The position of *primus inter pares* worked easily, the first being never challenged, nor the second aggressively asserted. They were free men practising their profession under a system singularly elastic. A policeman, father of one of my boys, once asked me what authority ordered the things which must be taught in school, and seemed to be very shocked when I told him that there was no such authority, but that the Ministry of Education published a book with the modest title of *Suggestions to Teachers*.

What ? No Orders to Teachers ? No. None. There is only a broad agreement about the subjects to be included in the curriculum, and not a rigidly exclusive one. There are as many methods as there are teachers, and plenty of books on How to Teach. My policeman visitor was more astonished at every word I spoke to him. He waved an uncertain hand.

"Do you really mean," he asked, "that you all do just what you like ?"

I said not quite. If ever there has been such a thing as the Sense of the Meeting, it exists in education. The teachers know that they have freedom of choice in all kinds of ways—what books of English literature shall be read, what parts of English History shall be studied in detail, and so on.

"Well, well," said my policemen. "So every school is different from all the rest ?"

Yes. I thought that might be said, and that it was a fact particularly true to the nature of the English people. My visitor leaned towards me anxiously. He had never suspected this chaos, so unlike the operations of the Police Force.

"So if you thought you would have the boys taught Chinese, that would be it ?" he asked.

"If there were a case for it that would measure up to professional standards, yes."

He shook his head.

"I don't get this professional angle of yours," he said. "I'm a policeman, you're a teacher. We both serve the public, don't we? And we're both under orders, aren't we?"

"Yes. We do and we are."

"Well, then," he said, a trifle aggressively, I felt. "What's the difference?"

"Very simple, and not significant to either of us personally," I said. "Your job is to prevent crime if you can, and to detect it when it occurs."

"Yes? Well?"

"To do your job, you need a tight organisation, with orders as clear as if you were in battle."

"Certainly."

"My job is to educate boys."

"That's my point."

"Well, to do it, I need freedom to study them as individuals, and prescribe what I think is right for them. You say schools are all different. I'm only saying that they ought to be because boys and girls and localities are different. Orders from somebody at the top wouldn't take any account of differences. You fail if you disobey orders. I fail if I can't use freedom."

"And that makes you a professional man?"

"I don't know. But it certainly makes doctors and lawyers and parsons professional men."

Of this remark he took little notice, for it had no relevance for him. He went away convinced that it was high time somebody somewhere started giving the teachers orders, after which the nation could expect the same efficiency from its teachers as it found in its policemen, never mind about the doctors, the lawyers and the parsons, concerning whose efficiency every man had his own opinion.

This freedom, which I and my staff enjoyed, in common with teachers everywhere, has its centre in the individual and receives influences from various quarters. The teacher's

employer is the Local Education Authority, County or Borough Council as the case may be. The Ministry of Education, which pays a part of the general bill, exercises an influence through its inspectors, its courses for teachers, its publications, and the pressure it can bring to bear on the Local Education Authority. The Training Colleges or Institutes of Education to which teachers go for their professional training have an influence on this freedom. But finally the teacher is alone with his pupils. The question he must not ask, nor expect to be answered if he does ask it, is "What shall I do?"

And this freedom is half the reason why a man or a woman takes up teaching as a profession. The other half lies in himself and in his answer to that question "What shall I do?" for as he may not ask it of anyone else, he must daily ask it of himself and find the answer in his techniques, his aspirations and his beliefs.

This is what makes him tick; and this is what makes it possible to underpay teachers and still be sure of a good flow of recruits into the profession.

Just before the bell went for end of play, I pulled out of my pocket Mr. Preen's list of nicknames.

"Gentlemen," I said, "may I have your attention for a moment? Mr. Preen has done a little research and has given me this list of the names by which we are known, *in absentia*, to the boys. If you will allow me to do so, I will inform you of them."

"I know mine," said Mr. Santaya. "Crotchety they call me. I hope it refers to my music."

Mr. Preen stood with his back to the door, an expression of omniscience on his face. As I read out the list, there was hearty and appreciative laughter from all but the victim in each case. He wore a look of slight strain until he heard his nickname, and then laughed in a forced and occasionally scornful manner.

"Well," remarked Mr. Aintree, my deputy, at the end, "it might have been worse, and at any rate, they've got nothing on us now. We know."

Mr. Gamlin, feared by the boys for his gifts of sarcasm, which I did not admire, gave a wintry smile.

"May I propose a vote of thanks to Preen," he said, "for his most successful bit of digging in the muck-heap?"

Mr. Gamlin had learnt that his nickname was Snakey.

"No, no," said Mr. Preen hastily. "I want no thanks. Besides, you're confusing the truth at the bottom of the well with muck-heaps."

"It's an odd thing," remarked Mr. French, "that one never hears the boys using nicknames for us. Even when they don't know there's a master about, they speak of us by our own names."

And this was, in my experience, quite true. I had never heard a single one of these nicknames, though I had often heard boys discussing class matters and referring to masters quite formally at times when they thought they were not being overheard.

"You're sure you didn't invent the lot, Preen?" suggested Mr. Stevens.

"No. They're all right," replied Preen.

"I suppose how you got them is a police secret," said Fairbrother, one of the younger men.

"It has to be," said Preen. "My sources might be in trouble from both sides if I told you who they were."

The sound of the bell for the next lesson came to our ears, and I left the staff room feeling that none of us was the worse for knowing this much more about himself as seen in the mirror of the boys' name for him.

DOWN THE CORRIDORS



THE time was three o'clock. There were two more half-hour periods before the school day came to an end. My class had a games period with Mr. Graham from three-thirty to four, and on my timetable the space for the forthcoming half-hour was filled with the word Optional.

The word had several applications. Sometimes it meant that boys could choose the subject or activity they personally wanted to pursue in the period. Maybe there was a balance of work unfinished from some other period, and this time could be used for doing it. There might be a class meeting on some point of common interest. The period was in short a blank cheque of time, and very popular with the boys, if only because of the pleasing uncertainty about how it might be spent.

Yesterday afternoon, when I went into my classroom, the boys were sitting ready for me. I sat down on a front desk with my feet on the seat, and looked at the class. I knew that Optional meant a number of conflicting hopes in various minds, and that I was sure to disappoint some people whatever we settled for.

This silence of mine was seized upon by an opportunist called Fred Gallon, dark and thin, with a bright questing mind, and coming from a poor home.

"Let's have a General Talk, sir," he proposed.

This noble title was none of my inventing. It was what the

Boys called the sort of talk which meandered sometimes, flew sometimes and trotted sometimes from subject to subject as like to a good conversation as the conditions of a crowded classroom would permit. I began this kind of talk because of my sense of the innumerable important things that I could not get into more formal lessons, nor even note down in my record book in the most straggling way, because they could not be foretold or foreseen.

I might invite questions on anything that was in the boys' minds, or begin with something which was very much in mine. Any starting point would do, because the first things I said were merely a raising of the hatch, so to speak. Everything happened to the talk after that.

I saw on the brow of good scholarly Bob Howitt a frown of distaste, and his spectacles seemed to glint with reproach.

"You don't fancy that, Howitt, do you?" I asked.

He had a mind much too precise to enjoy this roaming kind of teaching, feeling, I think, that for one nugget of gold he might get, he had to take an unreasonable amount of slush. He shook his head, softening his personal veto with a small smile.

"No, sir," he replied.

Gallon looked round with scorn at this poor fellow who had no taste for the swift-moving, the various, the unexpected.

"Let him get on with something else," he said. "We all like General Talks."

"I'm going to," I said. "Is there something you want to be doing, Howitt?"

Again Howitt nodded. I spread my hands, offering him the lot.

"Well . . ." I said.

As he rose and went to the cupboard, there was something in his carriage that apologised and yet did not apologise for being an odd man out. He took out, with slow care, his maths books, and returned to his place.

"Maths?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Go and work in my room. If anyone calls, you can deal with it. But don't fetch me unless you have to."

Out of the room went Howitt. Now then. . . .

The radio quiz was non-existent, but what happened next was its ancestor.

Why are thunderstorm raindrops larger than all other raindrops ?

If a policeman rides his bike without a light, is it against the law, would another policeman report him, and would he get a bigger fine than anybody else ?

If there are people on Mars or any other planet, would they go to Heaven when they die ?

How do you know it's 93,000,000 miles to the Sun ?

If money were abolished, and nobody charged anyone for anything, would it work ?

How do we know that a colour-blind person isn't seeing colours right ? How do we know that when two people say a rose is red, they're seeing the same colour ?

Why do coach-wheels on the films look as if they were turning backwards ?

What's the slowest speed anything can travel at ?

Why do people put R.S.V.P. on invitations, when please reply would do ?

And so on, ranging in allusion and suggestion from outer space to a garden party at Buckingham Palace, from astronomy and theology to a puzzle seen in a comic. I liked to watch a subject shyly raised by some character at the back of the class, see it considered, and either suffer dismissal or begin to gather pace and growth, branching out into thought and wonder, accompanied by laughter and finally die because it was by common consent done with.

It was not question and answer only ; nor a two-sided thing, boys versus me. It was a warm thing living its own life, keeping its own rules, maintaining its own order and conventions. The boys were mentally alive ; I hoped they learned something factual as well as discursive from it ; and I

valued it because it showed what the boys' minds were like and what turned over there.

Young Bertie Warman was just talking to us about the symptoms of stage-fright, and grinning at their violence when the bell went. From some, who liked talking better than playing games, a little groan went up. But most people were content with the change. There is always the sticker, in this case Fred Gallon, who will put in a plea.

"Can't we go on for a bit? It's only games."

But in State schools, the timetable is the master, so they went to games.

Now, with half an hour to myself, I could do a little marking. I went towards my room, but as I passed Mr. Riddle's room, the classroom door flew open, and Mr. Riddle shot out. He was evidently very excited and disturbed. He was a middle-aged man with dark hair and a large bald patch, a brown rather sporting sort of suit, and spectacles on his blunt nose. He was a very good chap who had one theory with which I was not much in accord. It was the theory of absolute and unquestioning obedience. It was the contravention of this which brought him out into the corridor now. I am equally in favour of obedience and tact. I was going to have to display plenty of the latter now.

"Headmaster," said Mr. Riddle, in firm and non-personal tones.

I stopped. The boys in the classroom were quite silent as the door stood open.

"Yes, Mr. Riddle?"

"Will you very kindly step into my room?"

I stepped in as desired.

All the boys were seated save one, a tall boy called Bishopp. Towards him, Mr. Riddle pointed an accusing finger.

"I have three times told that boy," he said in deadly manner, "to come out to the front. Three times he has refused."

Oh dear. One of those things. You shall! I shan't! Nobody gets through a long teaching career without at least once running into this one. I had experienced it like everyone

else. I always recalled a boy named Tredgill who on my very first day in a new school had tried to take my measure by saying "I shan't."

Secretly, I envied him his courage in being ready to stand up to a hearty young man twice his size, but I didn't mention that to him at the time, because what he was doing was to threaten my authority, my professional skill and my job all at one strong-chested go. What I did do was to accept the challenge, settle the dispute about who was who, and then make friends with him on terms I liked better than the first ones he offered.

It would be very silly to remark that most people nowadays seem to be strongly against authority ; but to those who have to exercise it, it too often and most dangerously looks like that, so that it is easier and more comfortable to refrain from its due use so as not to be charged with its undue use.

Well, in Mr. Riddle's classroom there was a boy who had crossed the line to disobedience, a man who quite properly looked to me to sustain his authority, and a very interested audience. I wished the situation away, but it stubbornly remained what it was.

"Bishopp," I said, "go to my room."

I could not, of course, be certain that in his present highly emotional state, the boy would even carry out that order. Some disappointment was, I am sure, felt in the desks at this move towards conducting the rest of the matter *in camera*. And I don't think I do Mr. Riddle an injustice if I say that in *his* heated state, he too was a little disappointed with me for wanting to adjust in private what had gone wrong so publicly. I imagined a scene much more to his present liking. I ought to have said with an iron expression :

"Give the order again, Mr. Riddle."

Either the boy would or wouldn't have obeyed.

If he did, that would have taken the sting out of it. And if he didn't, the buck would have been passed straight to me. What ? Defy Mr. Riddle *and* the Headmaster ? Heavens fall ! Clouds burst ! World end !

However, Bishopp quietly left his place, walked out of the room and as I followed him along the corridor, I saw him stop outside my door.

Like you, I did not yet know what had preceded this climax. I must get to know, of course, but it seemed to me that my first duty was to let a few temperatures come down, so that whatever was done would be done with the brains and not the blood. I wanted the picture to clear in the minds of all concerned, so that on my side I could act with wisdom and consideration. And above all, I wanted to avoid for everybody, including myself, the ugliness of a scene whose every value would be as false as quarter-thinking could make them, as deceptive and useless as feeling alone was bound to render them.

Alas, this policy sometimes entails the sacrifices of what look like obvious loyalties. I had, for example, left my faithful colleague to pick up the threads of his class life as well as he could, like a man in a drawing-room from which someone had snatched a smoking bomb and darted outdoors with it. He would be obliged to press on as indifferently as if he were really saying, "Have another cup of tea, Lady Fotherpike."

Not knowing—or perhaps knowing too well?—what I should do about the matter in my room, he couldn't even say with a dreadful warning note, "Now then, let that be lesson to you all."

All I could do was to assert yet again, as in any similar instances or for that matter in the routine of every day, that obedience was a necessary condition of our work, whatever the provocation . . . no, no . . . that would be disloyalty again.

I opened my door and beckoned Bishopp in to my room. Powitt had gone to games and Bishopp and I were alone. The room was calm and quiet. There was no audience to stimulate any kind of behaviour or condition feeling. I had no time to think of my first remark, for Bishopp sat down unbidden in a chair, put his arms on my desk, his head on his arms and wept without restraint.

I waited silently for this relief to pass, and when it had ended, the boy sat up, took out his handkerchief and dried his eyes. He looked at me and awaited my move.

"Tell me about it," I said.

It was very simple. Mr. Riddle thought he was talking to his neighbour. He was not. The master told him to come out in front. He refused. That was it. A mule and an angry driver.

"May I go and apologise?" he asked.

"And take your punishment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Off you go. And afterwards, see me again."

I know that all I had done in this matter was to provide the conditions in which cooler and possibly wiser counsels might prevail. I knew that for the boy's part, he had measured the size of his offence, and I esteemed him highly enough, on his past record, to believe that he would not be telling himself cynically that he had got away with that lot, but would, on the other hand, have learnt something more about the management of his own nature and of human relationships.

As for the boys in the class, they knew far too much about the life in school to suppose that anything constituted a precedent, except perhaps that in the worst moments and cases they could rely upon civilised, cool and humane treatment.

Mr. Riddle's situation was different. I was quite sure that he would do nothing more about it, would inflict no punishment, but would be divided between the feeling that I had somehow managed to administer a tacit rebuke that things had come to that pass in his room and the stronger feeling that I had smoothed the row over at his expense. This impression he would shrug off as one of the less pleasant of his working conditions. All Headmasters, he would say to himself, were a bane in some way; that was my particular way of being a bane.

I could not send for him, or any other assistant master, and preach him a little sermon about my views on what Headmasters ought to do in such cases, for if my views were not

clear to him in everything I did, there was no chance of my making them clear in words. But if I had felt the need to talk to him about this, I should have said something on these lines :

The most prolific single cause of common unhappiness is unsatisfactory personal relationships ; so the task of the school must be to teach ways of getting good and satisfying ones. You can't theorise to children, who have so little experience of life, about this, because it is too subtle a balance of perceived forces and because it is so much the fruit of experience and of living.

All you can do—and much the best thing to do—is to demonstrate your beliefs in practice every hour of every school day. How can you complain of a man who makes his philosophy of human relationships rest on authoritarianism and implied violence if that is what he learned, from observation, at school ? If a boy saw nothing of justice, humour, affection, tolerance, proportion, restraint and appeal in the methods of his headmaster, who is to teach him when the hour of learning is gone ?

If teachers use a kind of rule of thumb in their dealings with their pupils, saying, " If you do that, I do this," is not the whole problem of the relations between one human being and another over-simplified in the presence of young witnesses only too ready to accept simple methods of living ?

If the school suggests that the best way to solve a problem arising out of passion, selfishness and plain stupidity is to begin by ignoring all the tremendous resources of the common desire for peace and order, the common wish for the esteem of others, the fund of sympathy and affection especially found in the young ; and then, by virtue of a position of superior strength, to force a ready-made and ultimately unacceptable solution on the weaker, it is failing in one of the most important of its tasks.

It is perfectly clear to boys and girls what the school is trying to do, and they equally perfectly know the conditions on which this task may be carried out. It is reasonable therefore to

suppose that one has their goodwill and support in so arranging matters in school that the task shall be done and the conditions observed. This ought to be the basic assumption in the teacher's mind.

If you, Mr. Riddle, should complain that sometimes your conception of your position and authority is sacrificed to these ends, you should remind yourself that you come to school to teach, and that a demonstration of clumsy spiritual or temperamental handling of your pupils is bad teaching on this most important of all fronts.

Are we then not to do something about those clashes which *will* sometimes arise, however subtle and careful our management of others may be? Certainly we are; but what we do must look like the working of natural law, against which no man and no boy can feel a grudge. Nothing we do must provide secret justification for those feelings which are the enemies of good human relationships. No human being need feel ashamed of his rage in the presence of his opponent's rage. All boys not yet corrupted by bad example at home or at school will feel sheepish and ashamed at their own excess of misbehaviour if they are confronted with resolute calm and good humour, which leads the way to restitution and for that matter atonement through the paths of a civilised and right attitude in the teacher.

The Headmaster's job is to spread the atmosphere of sure justice and scrupulous attention to the individual throughout his school. In every encounter, each swift conversation, every word and action, he must illustrate his conception of perfect relationships. If that should fail of its example, and his boys are unhappy in their manhood because they don't know how to get on with other people, then the position is hopeless. He certainly can't right it by talk.

Indignation, anger, reproach . . . can these be used in school? Of course, just as they may be in adult relationships, and they are effective in school as with grown-ups in exactly the measure in which they are seen by their object to be justified. If not so seen, they count as ill-temper and are lost.

If I told all this to Mr. Riddle, he would listen silently, his pipe in his mouth, thinking what wonderful platform stuff it all was, for he would still be smarting from the feeling that young Bishopp had got away with it. In his mind, a scene would be going on in which the school was assembled, and a Headmaster with a name like Squeers was caning Bishopp to hell, and indirectly doing every other boy a lot of good. I'm pretty sure that if Mr. Riddle were physically present at such a scene, he would actually feel slightly sick. But in theory, that is what he would like. It is what I have heard sundry teachers say they would like. I find it hard to believe them, because they are not in other matters devoid either of taste or humour.

If there must be corporal punishment, let it at least be done in private, for it is too late to encourage a taste for public executions. I cannot think that teachers who say they are all for a public caning have read the Nazi record very carefully. Those who have will remember that the beginning of training for the true good Nazi bully was to show him public canings when he was still in the Hitler Youth; an evil parallel to starting the surgical practitioner off with something small like lancing a boil, so that he shan't flinch when it comes to something big.

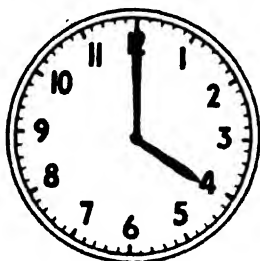
I thought of all this in connection with young Bishopp when he had gone back to his class, and checked my beliefs again in my mind to discover if I had applied them in this case correctly.

Bishopp had shown that he was greatly moved by the incident, that he saw he had done wrong by the code that governed his working-life, and that he was ready to express his regret to his teacher. Was it really sense that in the midst of his sorrow and tears, his emotional reverse from the hardness of rebellion to the softness of repentance, that I should aim a few blows at his backside with a length of cane, making his sorrow look clownish and myself ridiculously literal?

Well, maybe it was another man's kind of sense. It wasn't mine, and it never would be. I must continue to refuse to

act as executioner when another had already passed sentence, decline to do violence to my sense of person and occasion, and flatly deny to anybody the right to take away my supreme judgment as to what was right for my boys, and what was consistent with my illustrations of correct human relationships.

The afternoon sun was hot through the windows of my room. The clock said ten minutes to four. I should have to take the English books home with me after all and mark them there.



I MARKED the top half dozen and was opening the seventh when I heard Reggie Firth ringing the bell for the end of the afternoon. It is not the custom to shout "FAG," but I opened the door and called him in, for a messenger was just what I needed. He put the bell in its place on a window-sill and came in.

"Are you going straight home, Firth?"

"Yes, sir," he said, with that impression of the clean-cut that there was about everything he said and did. He passed my house on his way home.

"Take these essay books home for me, will you?"

"Certainly, sir."

As he was picking them up, I said:

"What have you learnt today?"

I've asked that one a thousand times. It's a fairly crucial question in a school, but it is mortifyingly apparent that it is a difficult one to answer. Reggie Firth fell into an appearance of thought.

"If it's so hard to answer, you haven't had much of a day, have you?"

"It's not that," replied Reggie. "But suddenly like that . . . I . . . wait a minute."

I looked at him with a grim smile.

"Well, come on. You come here to learn, don't you?"

"Oh yes, sir," agreed Reggie readily. "I'll tell you. I'm just thinking back."

"Thinking back, eh?"

He looked up brightly, a smile on his lips.

"I learned compound fractions . . . and how to spell fuchsia . . . and . . . you can't call drawing learning anything, can you?"

"You certainly can, or we're wasting your time, Master Firth."

"Oh, well, then I learned to draw a wheelbarrow."

"Yes? Anything else?"

"Let me see . . . no, I don't think so . . . oh, yes . . . the second part to 'O who will o'er the downs so free.'"

"That's the lot, is it?"

The way he smiled. It meant: well really what do you expect, you run the place don't you, it's your job to know what I learned besides you're only trying to pull my leg and isn't that enough for one day or am I supposed to have learnt the encyclopaedia?

"Yes, sir. That's about all."

"Well, off you go with those books; and try to learn a bit more tomorrow."

"Yes, sir. Good night, sir."

It's always good night at schoolday end. Never good afternoon. I fell in line.

"Good night, Firth."

As he opened the door to go out, in came my faithful Rex Lancer.

"Any letters, sir?"

"No, Lancer. I'm afraid I haven't touched what came in this morning. I'll have to deal with it when you've gone."

"I'll wait, sir."

"No, thank you. You get along home."

"I don't mind waiting, sir."

Persistent loyalty to the job, unpaid, unrewarded, uncontracted.

"No. I'll look after it. Thanks all the same."

"Well . . ." with a charming hesitation of politeness.

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, Lancer."

He went, and shortly afterwards, the sound of boys leaving the classrooms died away and the school fell silent.

I tapped out the testimonial for Winnish (who wanted to be a male nurse) on my aged Remington, put it in an envelope and stamped it. I would post it on my way home.

Then I rose, lit a cigarette, and went out of my room into the corridor.

Mister Grice was already in possession of the school. He was moving about a few yards from my door, throwing the scorned sweeping powder out of a bucket on to the floor, where it lay, a brown humid substance, awaiting Mister Grice's brush. The action of his arm suggested a farmer's wife throwing grain to a lot of invisible hens. When he saw me, he gave me a sketch of a salute, resigned, certain of no criticism, for had I not spent my day, I and my pupils, in making this dust and dirt for him to clear up?

"Good afternoon, sir," he said, with a gloomy respect.

"Good afternoon, Mister Grice," I replied.

There was nothing more to say; and nothing to think until morning light came to reveal the deficiencies of the tools, the agonies of the workman.

I walked out of the front door which I had entered seven

hours before at the beginning of a school day. There wasn't a boy in sight, and for a moment I thought of the night hours and the black silent school while we slept. Then I turned out of the gate into the road, and set off home to tea. I hoped it would be laid in the garden, for it was still warm.

THE END

